317 / OCTOBER 1999

THE NI
NEW INTERNATIONALIST

The big banana split

The People's Banana!

- Into the Guatemalan dead zone
- Crossfire in the Caribbean
- Fair trade and the World Trade Organization

PRICE: UK £2.50 AUS. $5.60 AOTEAROA/NZ $5.50 CANADA/US $4.50

◆

THE PEOPLE, THE IDEAS, THE ACTION IN THE FIGHT FOR WORLD DEVELOPMENT

COMING NEXT MONTH

Indonesia – reaching for rights

Indonesia's 17,000 islands are shaking with the footsteps of people demanding change. Students and workers took over parliament (right) and forced President Suharto to step down after 32 years of strongarm rule. Now the first free national elections since 1955 have been held.

But East Timor and Aceh suffer civil war and all over the country the military still grasps power in whatever backhand way it can, with the continued support of Western governments. Now that the Indonesian people have said what they want – to stop 'KKN' (corruption, collusion and nepotism) and to get the military out of their daily lives – will the new Indonesian leaders listen? And will the West hear them too?

- **Terrorizing the truth** – rebel group Aceh Merdeka's propaganda war.
- **Religious reformers** – Amien Rais speaks on Islam in the new democracy.
- **Flawed freedom** – East Timor's uncertain future.
- **The Clan of Kleptomaniacs** – ex-President Suharto's state-funded spending spree.

NOEL QUIDU / FRANK SPOONER

COMING SOON: WEATHER ◆ GLOBAL ECONOMICS ◆ PERU

Bound Insert Card. Side 1. Front. Subscription form for new UK readers. **Side 2**. Front. Subscription form for new Overseas readers and Gift Subscriptions. **Sides 3 and 4**. Back. Order Form for NI Publications and other products.

New Internationalist

The New Internationalist exists to report on the issues of world poverty and inequality; to focus attention on the unjust relationship between the powerful and powerless in both rich and poor nations; to debate and campaign for the radical changes necessary within and between those nations if the basic material and spiritual needs of all are to be met; and to bring to life the people, the ideas and the action in the fight for world development.

The **New Internationalist (NI)** magazine was founded by Peter and Lesley Adamson in 1970. Together with a range of other publications it is published by New Internationalist Publications Ltd which is wholly owned by the New Internationalist Trust and co-operatively managed:
Accounts: Peter Brown.
Administration: Véronique Szerauc.
Design: Alan Hughes, Andrew Kokotka, Ian Nixon.
Editorial: Vanessa Baird, Chris Brazier, Nikki van der Gaag, David Ransom, Anouk Ride.
Editorial (North America): Wayne Ellwood, Richard Swift.
Magazine marketing: Michael York.
Marketing (North America): Ian McKelvie.
Production: Fran Harvey.
Publications editor: Troth Wells.
Publications marketing: Lucy Kilpatrick, Dexter Tiranti.
Sales and circulation: Jo Lateu, James Rowland.

The **NI** Website:

http://www.newint.org/

The **NI** is published monthly except that the January and February issues are combined into one bumper issue.

The Independent News Collective is an association of radical and alternative publishers. INK publications cover issues of social, political and personal change, issues which are often neglected by the mainstream media. INK enables its members to cooperate on distribution, marketing and publicity. New Internationalist Magazine is an INK member.

It helps us occasionally to allow carefully screened organizations to mail our subscribers. If you do not wish to receive their material please write to your subscription office.

Subscription enquiries

Please write to your subscription office with full details including (if possible) your subscription number shown on the magazine address label. Please inform us of any change of address.

SUBSCRIPTION OFFICES AND ANNUAL PRICES

UK: Tower House, Lathkill St, Market Harborough, LE16 9EF. Tel: 01858 439616. Fax: 01858 434958
Individuals £24.85 p.a.; £6.85 qtly. Institutions £50. Student/Unwaged £14.70 (please telephone for further information).
Republic of Ireland: Tower House, Lathkill St, Market Harborough, LE16 9EF, UK. Tel: (0044) or (0) 1858 439616.
Fax: (0044) or (0) 1858 434958. *Individuals IR £29.85 p.a.; Institutions IR £55 p.a.*
Canada: PO Box 706, Markham, Ontario L6B 1A7. Tel: (905) 946-0407 Fax: (905) 946-0410
Individuals 1 yr – $38.50 (includes GST), in NF, NS, NB $41.38 (includes HST); Institutions 1 yr – $64.20 (includes GST) in NF, NS, NB $69.00 (includes HST); Overseas (by air) 1 yr – $60; GST Reg No R121784854.
United States: PO Box 1143, Lewiston, NY 14092. Tel: (800) 661 8700. Fax: (905) 946 0410.
Individuals 1 yr – $35.98 Overseas (by air) 1 yr – $60; Institutions 1 yr – $60.
Australia and PNG: 28 Austin Street, Adelaide, S.A., 5000. Tel: (08) 8232 1563 Fax: (08) 8232 1887.
E-mail: helenp@newint.com.au
Individuals (Australia) A$59.40; *Institutions* A$73.20; *Student/Unwaged* A$29.70.
All overseas subscriptions (air mail only) A$73.20; *Binders* A$12.00.
Aotearoa/New Zealand: PO Box 4499, Christchurch. Tel: +64 33 656 153 E-mail: newint@chch.planet.org.nz
Individuals $55; Institutions $65 (includes GST).
Japan: Intilincs Ltd, Mezon Sankei 201, 3-7-21 Shimizu, Suginami-ku, Tokyo 167-0033. Tel. & Fax. (03) 3395 3396.
E-mail: iq037580@mx2.nisiq.net. Special supplements with some Japanese translation available. Please inquire for details.
Rest of the World: Tower House, Lathkill St, Market Harborough, LE16 9EF, UK. Tel: (0044) or (0) 1858 439616.
Fax: (0044) or (0) 1858 434958.
Individuals £29.85 p.a.; £8.50 qtly. Institutions £55 p.a. Please pay in sterling by UK Cheque, Eurocheque, Visa, Mastercard or UK Banker's Draft. Despatch by air only.
E-mail: UK/Rest of world: newint@subscription.co.uk North America: magazines@indas.on.ca

Editorial and Advertising Offices

Editorial: 55 Rectory Road, Oxford OX4 1BW UK. Tel: (0044) or (0) 1865 728181. Fax: (0044) or (0)1865 793152.
E-mail: ni@newint.org **Advertising:** Tel/Fax: (0044) or (0) 1372 276233.
Canada/US Editorial: 1011 Bloor Street West, Toronto, Ontario M6H 1M1. Tel: (416) 588 6478. Fax: (416) 537 6435.
E-mail: nican@web.net **Advertising:** Tel: (902) 421 7022 Fax: (902) 425 0166.
Australia: 28 Austin Street, Adelaide, S.A. 5000. Tel: (08) 8232 1563 Fax: (08) 8232 1887. E-mail: sandyl@newint.com.au

Print and Distribution

Origination: Graphic Facilities, London UK.
Printed on recycled paper by Warners Midlands plc, UK.
News trade distributor: COMAG Specialist Division, Tavistock Works, Tavistock Road, West Drayton, Middlesex UB7 7QX, UK. Tel: (0044) or (0) 1895 433800. Fax: (0044) or (0) 1895 433801.
North America. Publications Contract 101400. Postage Paid at Toronto. Periodicals postage paid at Lewiston, NY. (USPS 329-770) US Post-master: send address changes to: New Internationalist, PO Box 1143, Lewiston, NY 14092.

Permissions and Indexing

Permissions: UK/Rest of the World: Sonja Singleton, Cover Stories, The Guardian, 119 Farringdon Road, London EC1, UK. Tel: (0044) or (0) 171 278 2332. Fax: (0044) or (0) 171 837 1192. Canada/US permissions: Toronto Editorial Office. Member of Cancopy. Reproduction of all material in **NI**, excluding photographs, is free to primary and secondary schools.

Indexed in the Canadian Periodical Index, CPI CD-ROM, CPI Online, the Canadian Index, Canadian Business and Current Affairs, and the Alternative Press Index. Available in full-text electronic format from EBSCO Publishing and Micromedia.

© New Internationalist Publications Ltd. 1999.

ISSN 0305-9529

Magazine printed on recycled paper

Not All Ethical Investment Specialists Are The Same

ETHICAL
INVESTORS GROUP
Ethical Financial Management

- Provide advice exclusively on ethical and green investments
- Help you match your money with your principles - whatever they may be
- Provide a countrywide financial advice service
- Distribute at least 50% of our own net profits to charities & campaigning groups, to date totalling over £250,000

WE CAN ARRANGE
PENSIONS, PEPs, LIFE ASSURANCE*, REGULAR SAVINGS*, LUMP SUM INVESTMENTS*
PRIVATE PORTFOLIO MANAGEMENT*

Contact The Ethical Specialists

Ethical Investors Group, Greenfield House, Guiting Power,
Cheltenham, GL54 5TZ Tel: 01451 850777

Regulated by the Personal Investment Authority
*The PIA does not regulate all of the products within this category.
Statutory Warning: The value of an investment can fall as well as rise.

Please Tick where appropriate
☐ Retirement Planning ☐ Lump Sum Investments* ☐ Regular Savings*
☐ Life Assurance and Protection*
Ms/Mr/Mrs ....
Address ....
.... Tel: Work .... Home ....
Ethical Investors Group is the trading name of Ethical Investors (UK) Limited
Registered in England. Registered number 2857294.
NI

Ethical investment

Money is power. You can use it recklessly or responsibly. As a consumer and as an investor.

However investing is complex. You could unwittingly invest in companies of whose products and services you disapprove. That's why we only choose funds that research companies thoroughly, and select their investments based on financial *and* ethical criteria.

To see how you could profit from our knowledge, without compromising your principles, call **0800 328 6818** for a free 'Ethical Investment Information Pack' or write to Barchester Green Investment, 45 Catherine St, FREEPOST, Salisbury SP1 2UR.

Barchester Green
Keeping your money clean.

Regulated by the Personal Investment Authority. Remember, the price of units can fall as well as rise and past performance is not a guarantee for the future.

Responding to Conflict is offering the following courses and workshops:

Working with Conflict
A highly practical, experience-based course for people working in areas of instability and conflict. Especially suitable for NGO staff, aid workers, those concerned with rights, relief, reconstruction and development. Includes conflict analysis, group dynamics, negotiation, mediation, trauma, confidence-building, conflict prevention and much else.
1st May – 7th July 2000
Places limited. Some scholarships available.
Applications now for courses based in the UK.
This is a ten week course.
Modules can be taken individually if required.

Strengthening Policy and Practice in Areas of Conflict
Primarily for staff of agencies concerned with relief, development, rights and peace-building programmes.
This workshop will provide practical models and methods to assist aid agency staff to analyse conflicts, and to integrate effective conflict-handling strategies into their programmes.
17th May – 21st July 2000
Responding to Conflict also offers, on request, local workshops and consultancies in English, French or Spanish. For more information, please contact RTC,
Selly Oak Colleges (NI), 1046 Bristol Road,
Birmingham B29 6LJ, UK.
Tel: (+44)(0)121 415 5641.
Fax: (+44)(0)121 415 4119.
E-mail: enquiries@respond.org
Website: www.respond.org/

Responding to Conflict provides opportunities for indivuduals and organisations to develop new ways of working on conflict.
Registered charity no. 1015906

IT'S WHAT ALL THE GIRLS
ARE WEARING THESE DAYS

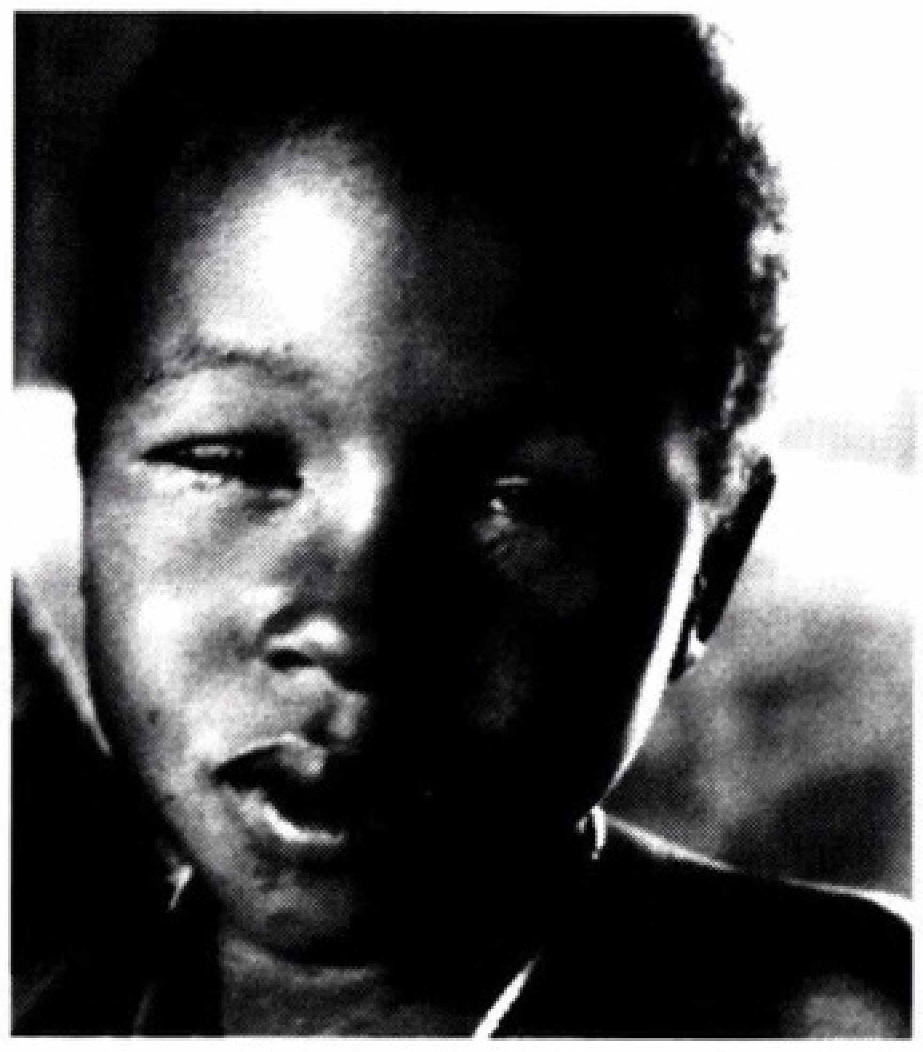
In many parts of Africa and Asia, young women are wearing tweezers around their neck. This is no fashion statement. They have trachoma, a horrific infection that scars their eyelids finally causing their eyelashes to turn inwards, into their eyes. With each blink, the eyelashes scrape against the surface of their eye. The result is agony, then blindness.

You'd pull out your eyelashes too.

In desperation, many people pull out their eyelashes with tweezers. Who wouldn't? But the eyelashes grow back, stronger than before, causing even greater damage.

The cost of preventing this agony? Just £1.20.

Trachoma is easy to prevent. The infection can be stopped in its early stages with just a small tube of Tetracycline ointment. The cost of the treatment is just £1.20. That means a donation from you of just £12 would be enough to treat TEN people, stopping their agony and helping to save their sight.



AND YOU CAN SEE WHY

Please give the gift of sight.

Sight Savers prevents and cures blindness in over 20 countries. But to support the eye clinics and Mobile Eye Units that treat the victims of trachoma and other eye diseases, we need the continued help of those prepared to give a little of their money to save the sight of others.

Please, if you possibly can, send us a donation now and help save more people from the terrible pain and permanent blindness of trachoma.

Here is my gift of:

£12 ☐ **£25** ☐ **£50** ☐ **£120** ☐ **£250** ☐ **Other £** ______

Please make your cheque payable to Sight Savers International, or if you wish to pay by MasterCard, Visa, Switch, Amex or CAF Charity Card, enter your card number in the boxes below.

☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

Card Expiry Date ____/____ **Issue No. (Switch)** ______

Mr/Mrs/Miss/Ms ____ **Initials** ____ **Surname** ______

Address ______

______

______ **Postcode** ______

Signature ______

Thank you.

Your gift will help Sight Savers to prevent unnecessary blindness, restore sight and train incurably blind people in the developing world.

To make your credit card donation work faster please call our donation hotline on:

07000 14 20 20

Please detach this form and return it, with your donation, to:
Sight Savers International, Room No. NI04, FREEPOST,
Haywards Heath, West Sussex RH16 4BR.

☐ We are registered data users under the Data Protection Act 1984. We never make our supporters' names available to commercial companies but do occasionally exchange names with carefully selected organisations. If you do not wish to be included, please tick the box.

SIGHT SAVERS INTERNATIONAL

ROYAL COMMONWEALTH SOCIETY FOR THE BLIND

Registered Charity Number: 207544

CONTENTS

GUY MANSFIELD / PANOS PICTURES

Banana split 7
David Ransom sizes up the Banana War contestants, before setting out for the battlefield in Central America and the Caribbean.

Into the dead zone 10
How a modern form of slavery survives in the poisoned plantations of Guatemala.

And another thing... 14
Cartoonist Viv Quillin casts an eye over the uses and abuses of the fruit.

Caught in the crossfire 15
Small farmers on the island of Dominica have to think twice before throwing in the towel.

BANANAS – THE FACTS 18

Fruit of the future 20
Something stirs in the Dominican Republic – could it be the perfect banana?

The Battle of the Banana 24
A pocket history of the war.

One short of a bunch 26
Given half a chance, world trade will always take the wrong turning. David Ransom argues that a change of direction may come sooner than we think.

What you can do 29

Letters 2
Letter from Lebanon 3
Update 4
The NI Interview with **Albert Brojka** 31
Reviews: plus
Nadezhda Mandelstam classic 32
NI Crossword 34
Endpiece: by **Christopher Shewen** 35
Country profile: Nepal 36

FRONT COVER DESIGN: **IAN NIXON** PHOTO: **MARK MASON**
MAGAZINE DESIGNED BY **IAN NIXON**.

THIS MONTH'S **THEME**

Bananas

FROM THIS MONTH'S **EDITOR**

At 11.11 in the morning of 11 August, as thousands of pocket cameras flashed at a total eclipse of the Sun lost somewhere behind the clouds over Cornwall, England, most of us at the **NI** office were peering into a bucket at the reflection of a radiant banana in the skies above Oxford. Or so it seemed to me when I looked – through the rather fetching pair of shades you see in the picture – at the one per cent of the Sun that wasn't eclipsed but cast a chill, eerie light over a world without birdsong, like the deadly silence that hangs over the poisoned banana plantations of Guatemala.

Had I not been working on this magazine at the time I don't suppose I'd have seen any connection between the awesome celestial spectacle and a mischievous tropical fruit. Bananas, like a total eclipse, induce a special brand of lunacy – Woody Allen zipped up in a banana, the city of Liverpool erecting a half-banana-half-sheep sculpture, the European Union legislating on the degree of permissible bend, or me setting out in search of the terrible truth behind this food of jokes.

When anyone asked me what I was doing I had, quite naturally, to say: 'Bananas.' This unlocked a torrent of anecdotes, like the one about the number 49 'banana bus' in London that always came in bunches. I did not know, for example, that over-anxious parents of infants are apt to mistake the undigested remains of bananas for worms. Search the Internet for bananas and you come up with the Bananarchist website (http://www.geocities.com/NapaValley/1702/) which sports a Hammer and Banana masthead. Bar owners in the region of France where Roquefort cheese is made are apparently charging five dollars for a can of Coke, in revenge for US import duties imposed on the cheese because of an international trade war called... yes, the Banana War.

The coincidence of one battle in this war with the bombing of Serbia spawned lampoons in the press depicting 'cruise' or 'ballistic' bananas launched between allies in NATO. I chuckled, although at the time the walls of my home shook every evening at dusk as bombers took off for Serbia from the nearby Fairford airbase.

In some ways the Banana War is more insidious than 'real' war. No-one knows, for instance, what the long-term effects on the human body of pesticides like organo-phosphates will be. I brought back from Guatemala a strip of plastic impregnated with pesticide and I've been trying to find out precisely what it is, as I promised the plantation workers I would (see page 13). I've done the rounds of agricultural colleges, public-interest institutions, government departments and private laboratories, without so far finding anyone either willing or able to do the analysis. I've been spun yarns about beehives, vacations, Scottish crofters, how to dissect frozen bananas with matchsticks, the state of tea plantations in Sri Lanka; but I'm left to conclude that commercial interests are at work suppressing the hard evidence. If anyone reading this can help, please contact me urgently and we'll publish the result in a future issue of the magazine.

David Ransom.

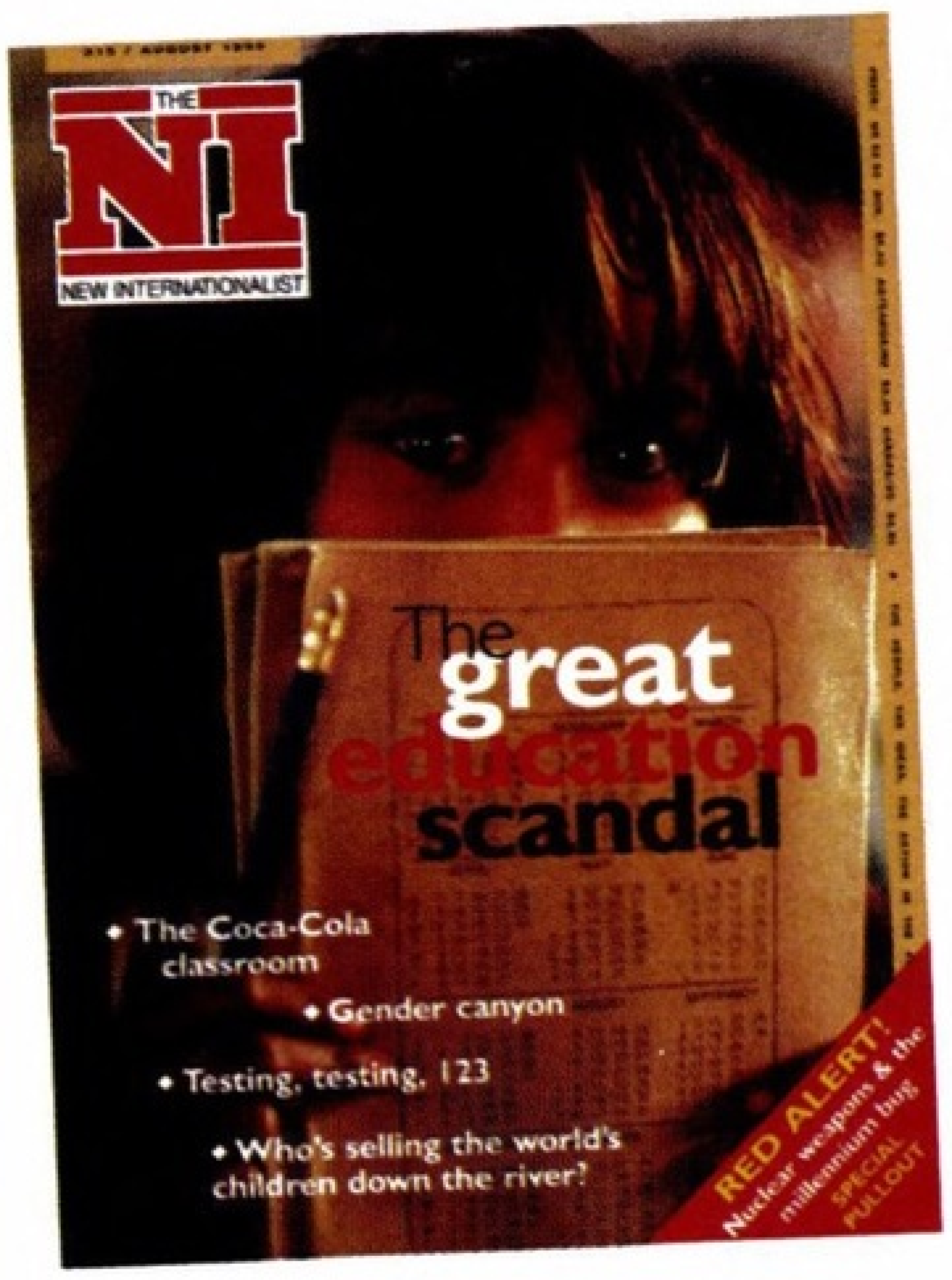
David Ransom
*for the **New Internationalist** Co-operative*

Letters

The New Internationalist welcomes your letters. But please keep them short. They may be edited for purposes of space or clarity. Include a home telephone number if possible and send your letters to the nearest editorial office. The address and e-mail are inside the front cover.

Girls beat boys

In your August edition on ***Education*** (**NI 315**) Chris Brazier describes how in most countries the big education problem is the exclusion of girls from school whilst in the countries where boys and girls have equal school access the problem is the tendency of girls to outperform boys.


THE NI NEW INTERNATIONALIST
The great education scandal
• The Coca-Cola classroom
• Gender canyon
• Testing, testing, 123
• Who's selling the world's children down the river?
RED ALERT! Nuclear weapons & the millennium bug SPECIAL PULLOUT

Isn't there a logical connection between these problems? Isn't it because those in charge, both past and present, guessed that given equal access, girls would tend to outperform boys? Sexual inequality doesn't happen by accident, but out of intention.

Malcolm Verrall
Wolverhampton, England

Three clichés

Chris Brazier seems unaware of the real scandal in the ***Great Education Scandal*** (**NI 315**). You surely broke your record for the number of clichés in one issue. I mention three:

'Education is life.' Well, hooray! It may have been true simply by definition for thousands of years, but it stops being so when Western-style education takes over. 'Fundamental human right' (to schooling). What does this mean when the result is compulsory attendance?

The message of your issue was that when a culture has been thoroughly undermined by Western economies it should then be saddled with a Western education system – which we hope will have different results from any such system in the past. What actually happens is that indigenous oral traditions, beliefs, customs and even language disappear.

So here's the third cliché: '*Who* is selling the world's children down the river?'

Ken Regelous
Kilgetty, Wales

Y2K Wash

The 'Red Alert!' pull-out section (**NI 315**) was much appreciated. Two similar initiatives are the Nuclear Weapons De-alerting Letter and the Y2K World Atomic Safety Holiday (Y2K WASH).

A letter calling for the nuclear arsenals to be taken off 'launch-on-warning' status during the critical rollover period was sent to Presidents Clinton and Yeltsin on Hiroshima Day, 8 August. The letter was signed by many politicians and over 270 organizations. The campaign is being organized by John Hallam of Friends of the Earth, Sydney (Tel: +61 2 9517 3903, Fax: +61 2 9517 3902, E-mail: nonukes@foesyd.org.au).

Y2K WASH supports the de-alerting of nuclear weapons systems. It also calls for reactors and nuclear-processing facilities to be taken off-line and reliable back-up power systems to be in place from 1 December until the crisis is over. The campaign is being co-ordinated by Yumi Kikuchi in Tokyo (Tel: +81 3 5345 5618, Fax: +81 3 5345 5613, E-mail: yumik@awa.or.jp).

An e-mail list has been set up to facilitate information exchange and planning between activists who are working on the two campaigns. To subscribe send a blank e-mail to:
<y2k-nuclear-subscribe@egroups.com>.

Paul Swann
London, England

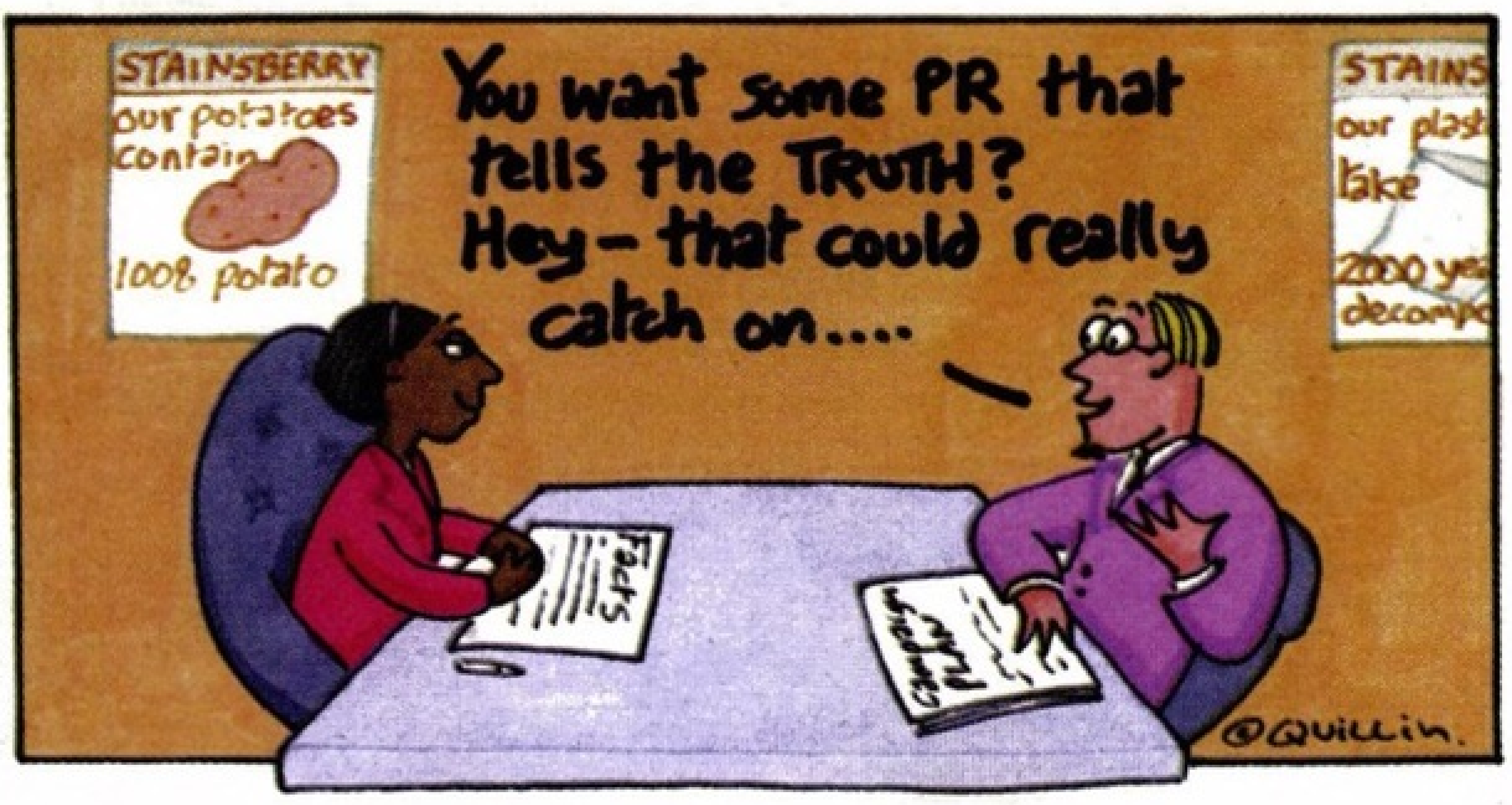
Good PR

I'm glad you tackled the subject of propaganda (**NI 314**) but it leaves a lot of questions. If I were running a business, I would get some PR advice, because I can't trust the media to do a fair job of reporting the truth – they are too concerned with their own sales and ratings. Can't there be good PR, which tries to ensure you get a fair hearing? Can't even the big and powerful have good PR? I would have liked some criteria for this.

Yes, I do need to be helped to think for myself. But big issues like the war in Kosovo are complex and the information specialized and often restricted for security reasons. Surely in a democracy we appoint some of our most gifted and able citizens to make better decisions for us than we would make ourselves? When the press hound our leaders' every move in order to create cheap headlines, democracy easily degenerates into popularism, driven mostly by emotion. No war today is going to be popular once our soldiers start getting killed. I reckon that it's popularism that forced the policy of safe-distance bombing.

I think your treatment was too kind on journalists. But then, as journalists you're part of all that. Are we really so safe in your hands? I trust a lot of what you write in the **NI** – should I? You didn't help me think for myself about THAT.

David Muir
Long Eaton, England


STAINSBERRY our potatoes contain 100% potato
You want some PR that tells the TRUTH? Hey – that could really catch on....
STAINS our plast fake 2000 yrs decompo
Facts
Fed Untruths
©QUILLIN.

VIV QUILLIN

Bad language

I am writing in protest at the use of bad language in ***Mind Games*** (**NI 314**). Adam Porter's article uses the phrase 'boy are these f***ers poor' and also describes a cab as costing f***-all to hire. Both he and the editor use the phrase 'pissed off' which although less offensive still grates.

It is not just that I find this use of words offensive but it is also distracting (from the main point of the article) and unnecessary. A good journalist can make a strong statement without resorting to expletives. I also find it amazing that a magazine that prides itself on respecting the people of the South should describe Manila's street children as f***ers.

Please keep this sort of language out of future issues – it does not enhance your reputation for high quality journalism.

Shirley John
Huntington, England

Hanoi hope

In your issue on ***Green Cities*** (**NI 313**) I was very disappointed with the article 'Green Odyssey' and in particular on the section about Hanoi. I have lived in Hanoi for different periods of time since 1989. During that time I know that the People's Committee struggles with the problems of development and maintaining a liveable city. The article did not take into account many of the initiatives the city is trying to instigate.

Briefly, some of these are: having only very small, efficient taxis; increasing lakes for run-off and parks for people; clean green agriculture trials near Hanoi; tree planting extensively in the city (partly for Hanoi's 1,000th birthday in 2010); preservation plans for the Old City; new satellite towns; a better public transport system; special lanes for bicycles. Having received no war reparation, Vietnam struggles more than many other countries to stretch its money across essential present and future needs. It is certainly trying to prevent Hanoi becoming like Bangkok.

I wanted to read a well-researched article – not these 'tourist impressions'.

Rosemary Morrow
Katoomba, Australia.

Prejudiced profile

I was appalled to find your 'Country Profile' of Guyana (**NI 310**) replete with blatant prejudice against the few foreign investors in gold-mining and forestry, and misinformation, distortions and rhetoric about the effects of their operations on the forest environment and Amerindians. The Canadian and Malaysian investments were each a godsend, certainly whilst the world prices for gold and plywood were favourable.

Guyana's motto is 'one people, one nation, one destiny' and this includes the Amerindians. The country's main hope of escaping the poverty abyss is to make use of opportunities to cash in forests (on a sustainable basis) and minerals. And since Guyanese have neither the technology nor the money they must inevitably rely on and compete for foreign investors.

It may be that real self-government is a distant dream for Guyana and other heavily indebted countries. This is not because of foreign investors, but because of the new imperialism and the action of those who would jump on its bandwagon in making these countries forever impoverished, because of restrictions on development and trade as the price for aid and debt relief. A 100-per-cent debt relief for Guyana, though allowing greater expenditure on health and education, would not immediately improve its per-capita GDP of $454 (compared with $3,600 for neighbouring Trinidad and $7,000 for Barbados).

Daoud Yamin
Croydon, England

The views expressed on the letters page are not necessarily those of the New Internationalist.

Letter from Lebanon

Lost in Shatila

Reem Haddad meets a young man who survived the massacre in the Palestinian camp 17 years ago.

IT wasn't the first time I had seen him. As a journalist for a Lebanese newspaper, I had been to the Palestinian camp of Shatila in Beirut on several occasions. And every time, a young man, about 22 years old, was shuffling aimlessly along the camp's narrow, sewage-ridden streets. Unlike many others who stared at me – a stranger who obviously had not come to help them but simply to observe – the young man came up to me and inquired:

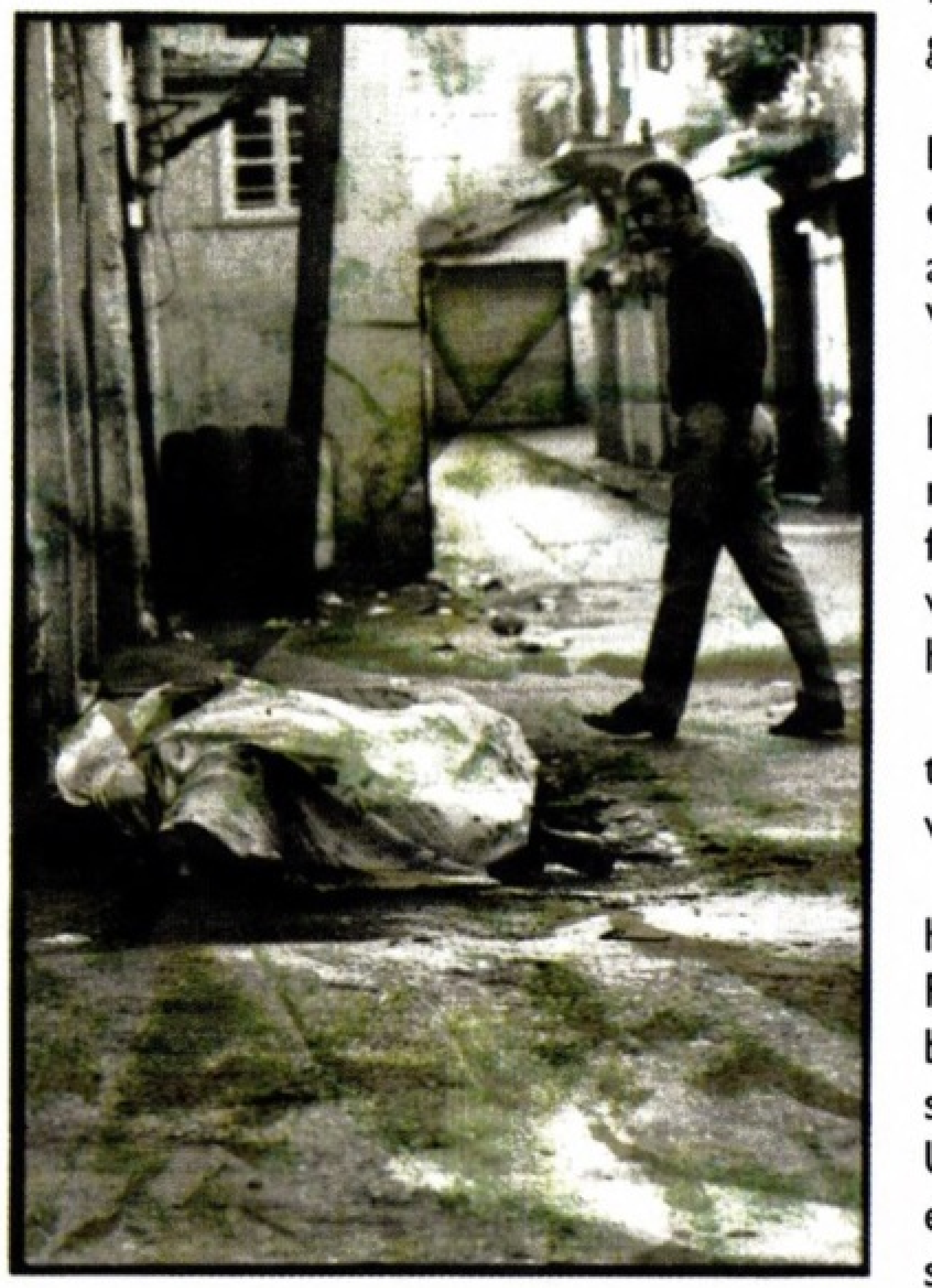
'Are you lost?'

It's funny, but I was just thinking the same about him. His empty brown eyes stared into mine. I found myself staring back, unable to answer. Never in my life had I seen such a look of despair in someone so young.

'I am Mohammed,' he finally said. 'I see you are a journalist. Perhaps I can show you around the camp.'

Mohammed was a good guide. His voice was clear and his manners polite. But for some reason, I kept waiting to see him smile. He never did. Hesitantly, I asked: 'Are you not happy, Mohammed?'

'Happy?' he replied and became silent. After a long while and just when I was chiding myself for apparently insulting him, he pulled out a shabby wallet from his trouser pocket. He grabbed a folded but wrinkled piece of paper and handed it to me. Unfolding it, I found myself looking at a magazine picture of several mutilated bodies.



Mohammed looked away.

'The last time I remember laughing was when I was five years old,' he said. He took the picture back and carefully folded it into his wallet. 'That was my family,' he said.

Mohammed was five years old when the Israeli army accompanied by its Lebanese Christian militia allies attacked the Shatila camp in 1982, massacring more than 2,000 people.

'At first we heard shelling and shots but my father didn't think it was serious,' said Mohammed, pausing between every memory. 'We joined my uncle's family downstairs and played cards and laughed. There were 15 of us.'

Suddenly, a woman who was bleeding profusely barged in on them and the family heard screams from the camp.

'We all ran into a small room to hide. It was tiny and we could barely breathe. Our old neighbour went outside to see what was happening. He was shot. His daughter followed him and she was shot. My parents told us to be quiet so the soldiers wouldn't hear us.'

One baby, however, began wailing, alerting nearby soldiers.

Upon finding the frightened family, they seized the men and marched the women and children to a plot of land just outside the camp.

'An Israeli soldier grabbed me and gave me a biscuit. He asked me what my father was wearing,' said Mohammed. 'I knew he wanted to know whether my father was a fighter. I didn't say anything.'

The soldiers pushed the women and children into a large pit in the ground.

'They were about to bury us alive when some explosions went off nearby and they ran to investigate. We ran away.'

Three days later, Mohammed and his mother returned to the camp. His father's and uncles' bodies were lying in front of the house, severely mutilated.

'My mother couldn't take it and died a short while later,' he said.

Since then, Mohammed has been on his own. Fending for himself, the boy continued to attend a school funded by the United Nations. He later enrolled in a vocational school.

'I thought if I could get an education and learn a skill, I could somehow get my life going again and forget the past,' he said.

For the first time since he started his story, Mohammed looked at me. The pain in his eyes silenced my journalistic enquiries. I knew as well as he did that he could only look forward to a desolate future. His education will not serve him to 'get his life going' as he said. He will never be able to find a decent job. He will never be able to travel as he wishes. At 22, his future is bleak. Like all Palestinians in Lebanon, Mohammed is barred from working in any skilled profession. As a descendant of Palestinian refugees, he is himself still considered a refugee, and therefore in the eyes of the law, has no rights in the country.

'Happy?' he said. 'I just exist. I hate my life. I hate myself. I just want to leave this camp and this country. I want to start anew somewhere else. But I'm only a Palestinian. Who would help me?' ■

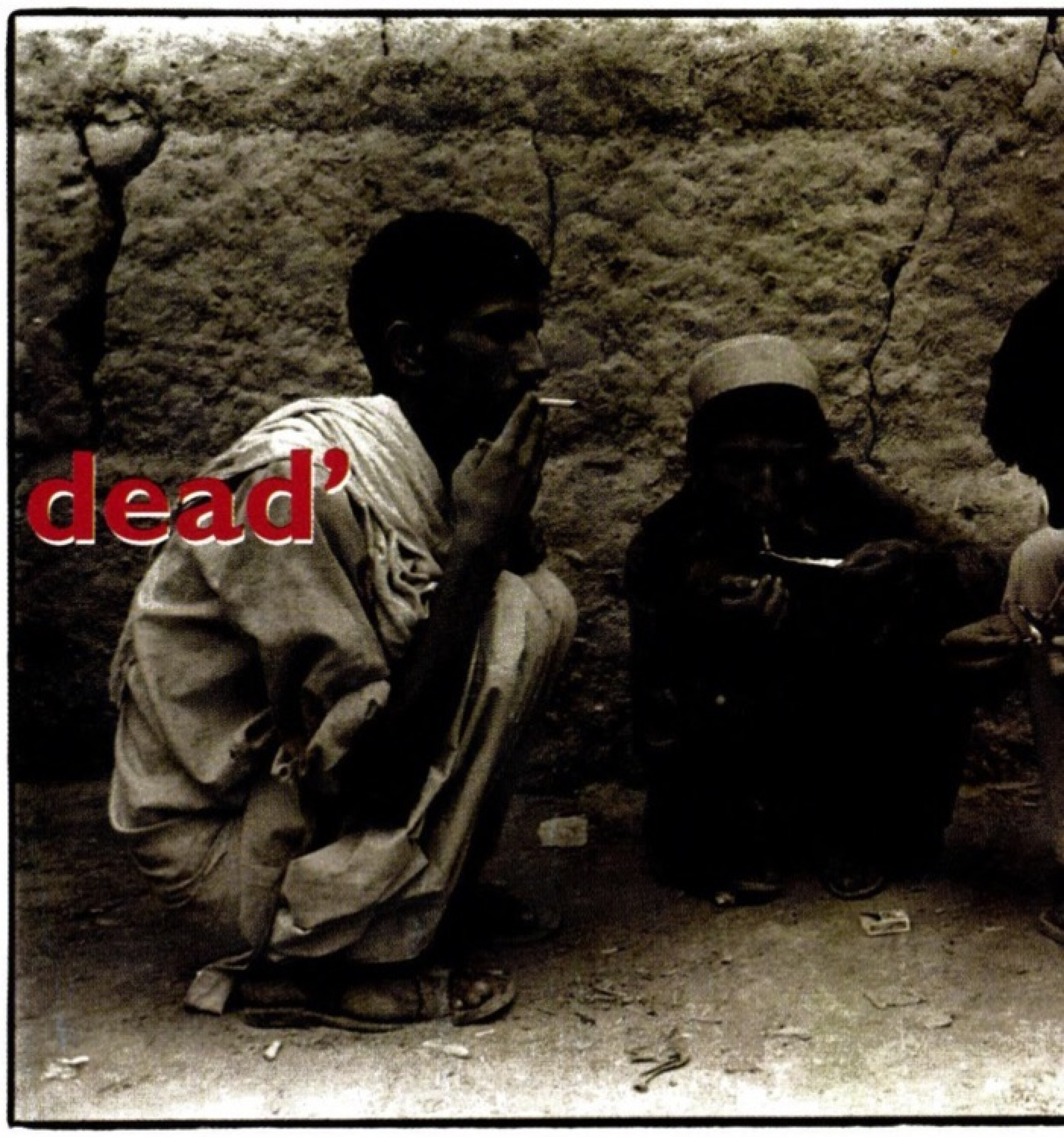
Reem Haddad is a reporter for the *Daily Star* in Beirut.

Photograph of the Shatila massacre by Tony Clifton and Catherine Leroy (*God Cried*, Quartet 1983).

Update

Killing the 'living dead'

A special report on the Pakistani drugs trade



PAYNE / FRANK SPOONER / LIAISON

In Karachi, Pakistan, they are called the 'living dead'; scavenging for food in the dirtiest of the open garbage heaps, or squatting cock-style in rows in front of cheap hotels in congested market places just in case a customer buys them a free meal. They can be seen sitting in groups on pavements, or even inside the manholes of the underground drainage lines, inhaling the lethal whitish fumes. They are called *heroinchis*, or heroin addicts, easily identified because of their dirty *shalwar-kamiz* (baggy Pakistani shirts and trousers), unshaven faces, the lost gaze in their eyes and the pale colour of their skin.

'Between themselves these two million heroin addicts puff away 130 metric tons of the deadly white powder each year,' says Pakistani psychiatrist Dr Saleem Azam. The last national survey showed that the number of heroin addicts had grown seven per cent per year between 1988 and 1993, and Dr Azam conservatively estimates the same growth rate from 1993 onwards. In reality, this translates into 16 new heroin addicts each hour.

A significant percentage of the heroin addicts are street dwellers, and at least ten per cent of such addicts are children. Entire families are vulnerable to the deadly addiction in Pakistan today – already eight per cent of the total heroin addicts are women.

There is a diabolical link between heroin addiction and peddling. A study showed that 76 per cent of all heroin addicts retail the drug to support their addiction. 'The addict buys an extra packet for 50 *rupees* and sells it for 75 *rupees* ($1.5), earning half the money for the next packet for himself,' Dr Azam says.

Curing the addicts and bringing them back to sobriety may remain an elusive dream. Detoxification takes about 15 days and is done in centres where the addicts are kept locked up. The cost of the treatment is at least $10 per day, which means that in a country where the average per capita income is $483 a year, nearly 99 per cent of the addicts cannot afford to come to these centres.

There are five rehabilitation centres of any repute for heroin addicts throughout Pakistan which in total can handle fewer than 3,000 patients at a time. Those who run the centres concede that less than five per cent of all who come quit the drug for good, while 95 per cent get hooked again.

In most cases, heroin is sold in Pakistani cities under the watchful eyes of the police, who have a stake in the local drug trade. In Karachi's oldest shanty area of Lyari, drug peddling is a thriving business and continues in the presence of the police, who also seldom intervene in gunfights between rival drug gangs.

Public opinion is unanimous in blaming the military junta that ruled Pakistan during the 1980s for the heroin curse. During the bloody communists-versus-Mujahideen war in Afghanistan – the former helped by the erstwhile Red Army and the latter aided by the American CIA – the West looked the other way while heroin addiction made inroads in Pakistani society. It is an open secret that the Afghan Mujahideen transported the first consignments of the deadly powder to Pakistan in the early 1980s when Afghanistan was under Russian occupation.

Hope is fast fading that the war against heroin, even if started in real earnest, can ever be won. Afghanistan produced over 3,200 tons of opium in 1998 – up by 16 per cent from the year before – and the area under cultivation rose to around 64,000 hectares in 1998, an increase of nine per cent as compared to 1997. The ruling Taliba'an sees no evil in poppy cultivation, arguing that Islam allows doing forbidden things when human lives are under threat.

Reports say lush green poppy fields can be seen in Afghanistan's Kandahar valley, once a store of apples, grapes and other fruits. The apple production in this area before the war (which began in 1979) was so huge that villagers even used the fruit to clean themselves after attending to a call of nature. But now it is the poppy that is the most favoured cash crop – one kilogram of poppy fetches the farmer around $50. The farmers say that no one in their right mind would replace poppy with wheat, which would sell for less than a dollar.

Commanders of assorted factions of the Mujahideen groups, notably the ruling Taliba'an, hold a big stake in heroin smuggling. 'Armed to the teeth, the smugglers move in convoys of the latest model four-wheel vehicles, fitted with state-of-the-art communication equipment. When we see them coming our way, we have to make way for them,' says a major in the Pakistan army's Frontier Corps, that guards the borders with Iran and Afghanistan. In Iran, the carriers get paid in bag-loads of dollars and the heroin is then transported in other vehicles to Turkey and from there smuggled across Western Europe. Other convoys snake through smuggling routes in Pakistan's southwest and reach Karachi. A part of the heroin is consumed locally here and the rest is shipped to Europe via East African ports and the free port of Dubai in the Gulf.

Ahmar Mustikhan

Condor dragged into court

Estela Carlotto and Rosa Roisinblit from the Plaza de Mayo Grandmothers are taking South American dictators to court in conjunction with crusading Judge Baltasar Garzon (who is conducting the case against former Chilean dictator Pinochet). During the Argentine organization's 20-year existence, the Plaza de Mayo Grandmothers have initiated investigations and charges related to the murders, kidnappings and changes of identity of the estimated 200 children born in prison to women who subsequently disappeared during the years of the military dictatorship (1976-83). Plaza de Mayo Grandmothers say 'a systematic, co-ordinated and multinational operation committing crimes against humanity' called Operation Condor will be uncovered through their evidence. This will allow Garzon to extend his investigations beyond Pinochet to ex-dictators in Argentina, Bolivia, Paraguay, Brazil and Uruguay who took part in the operation.

IPS/Granma

DAVID BROWNE / FRANK SPOONER

Damned and defiant

The Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA) has announced a *satyagraha* (a struggle for truth) in response to the decision by the Indian Supreme Court to allow the Gujarat Government to raise the height of the Sardar Sarovar Dam on the Narmada river by five metres. The NBA claim this is going to cause immense flooding and the displacement of over 2,000 families. A programme of peaceful resistance has been organized including a *yatra* (a mass walk) through the valley, an 11-day fast and nationwide protests. The Madhya Pradesh Government supports the opposition and has filed a writ demanding a full review of the dam, arguing that a lower dam height is needed. Villagers in the submergence zone have resolved to face the rising waters rather than leave their homes, declaring in a joint pledge: 'We will drown, but we will not move.'

Camille Warren

Swapping genders in the sewage

The 90-per-cent drop in numbers of Atlantic salmon over the past 20 years may be due to 'gender-bender' chemicals in sewage and industrial effluent, according to the Canadian Department of Fisheries and Oceans in New Brunswick. The physical changes which normally occur to allow salmon to adapt from freshwater to seawater are regulated by oestrogen. But fish from areas sprayed with an insecticide which contains 'gender-bending' nonylphenols did not undergo this necessary development and died once they reached seawater. Spraying this chemical has been discontinued but the Department has evidence that similar concentrations of nonylphenols come from sewage, pulp and textile plant runoff.

New Scientist Vol 162 No 2189

Government, not activists, found guilty

Citing international law, a district court in the state of Washington, US, found eight nuclear disarmament protesters not guilty of charges stemming from a protest at Naval Submarine Base Bangor, one of two US Trident submarine bases. The activists faced a maximum penalty of 90 days in jail and $1,000 in fines if convicted of the misdemeanour charge of disorderly conduct.

Attorney Ken Kagan, who represented seven of the defendants, argued that the defendants believed they had lawful authority from international treaties which oblige the US to forswear first-strike weapons – an example of which is the Trident submarine. According to the US Constitution, any treaty signed by the United States Government becomes the 'supreme law of the land'. Juror Merkle comments: 'If the Government is making (nuclear weapons), then they're committing the bigger crime.'

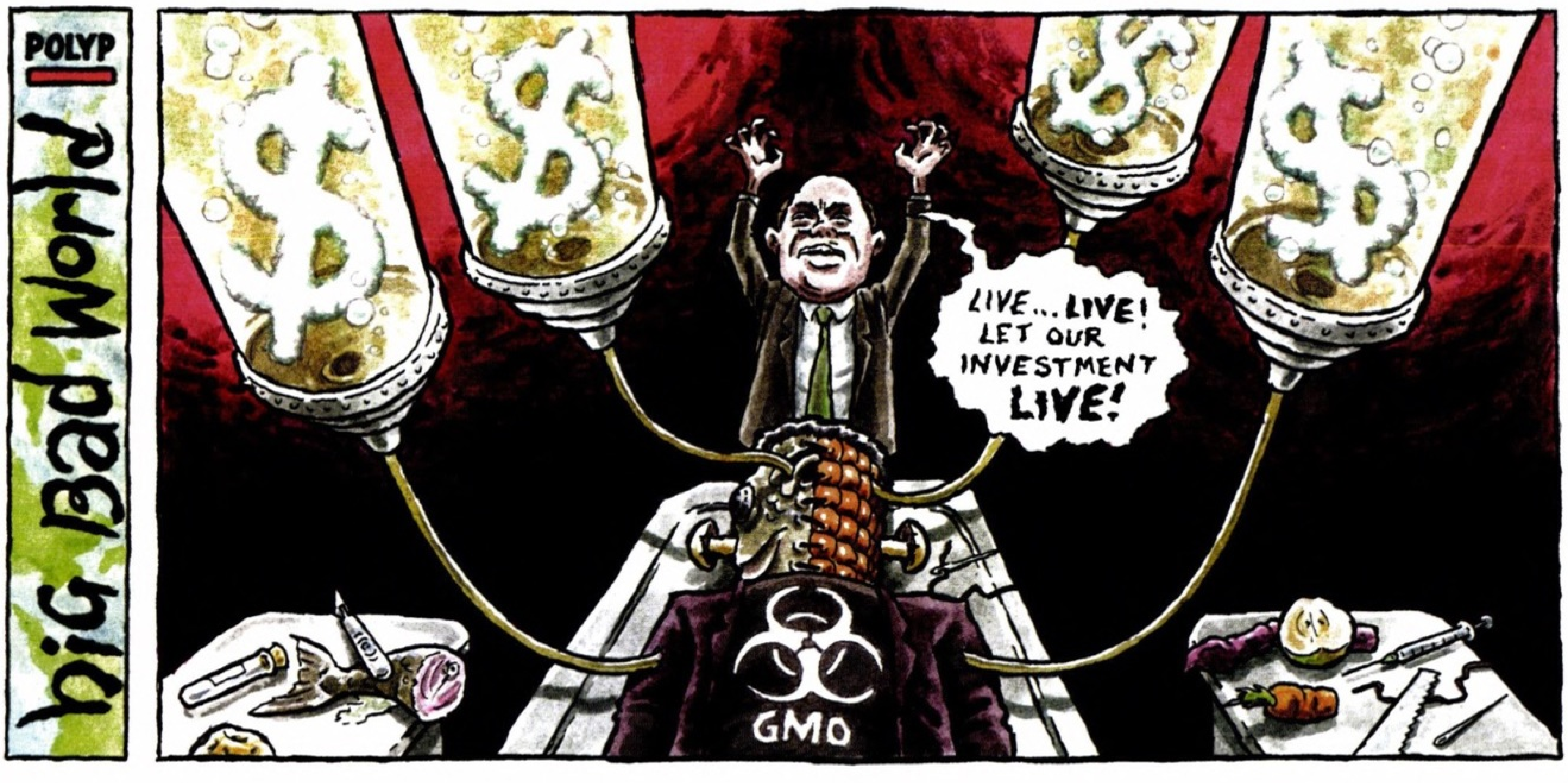
Jeff Shaw

Bombs away

Since the Second World War the US has bombed 21 countries: China (1945-46 1950-53), Korea (1950-53), Guatemala (1954, 1960, 1967-69), Indonesia (1958), Cuba (1959-60), Congo (1964), Peru (1965), Laos (1964-73), Vietnam (1961-73), Cambodia (1969-70), Lebanon (1983), Grenada (1983), Libya (1986) El Salvador (1980s), Nicaragua (1980s), Panama (1989), Bosnia (1995), Sudan (1998), Afghanistan (1998), Yugoslavia (1999) and Iraq (1991-99).

Middle East Realities

FRANK SPOONER / LIAISON


POLYP
big Bad World
LIVE... LIVE! LET OUR INVESTMENT LIVE!
GMO

Update

SEAN SPRAGUE / PANOS

Young but not innocent

A teenager in Rio de Janeiro is twice as likely to be murdered as one in Bogotá, Colombia, which is considered Latin America's most violent city, according to a UN study. In the past, violent attacks involving teenagers were limited to the streets, and usually were fights between rival groups during neighbourhood dances in Rio de Janeiro's poorer districts.

One in five violent attacks now takes place in school, according to police, who in April logged 20 reports of physical violence and death threats among public and private secondary school students. In the southern state of Paraná, considered a model of public safety, some high schools have eliminated free time between classes to prevent student violence. The presence of armed guards has become routine in many São Paulo secondary schools, where drug trafficking aimed at young people is high.

Latin America Press Vol 31 No 21

Learning to listen

A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) has been negotiated over the once controversial Voisey's Bay mining plans. When the Voisey's Bay Nickel Company bought the rights to mine in northern Labrador in 1996, the local Innu and Inuit fought to protect their land through protests, legal action and by participating in the environmental assessment of the proposed mine.

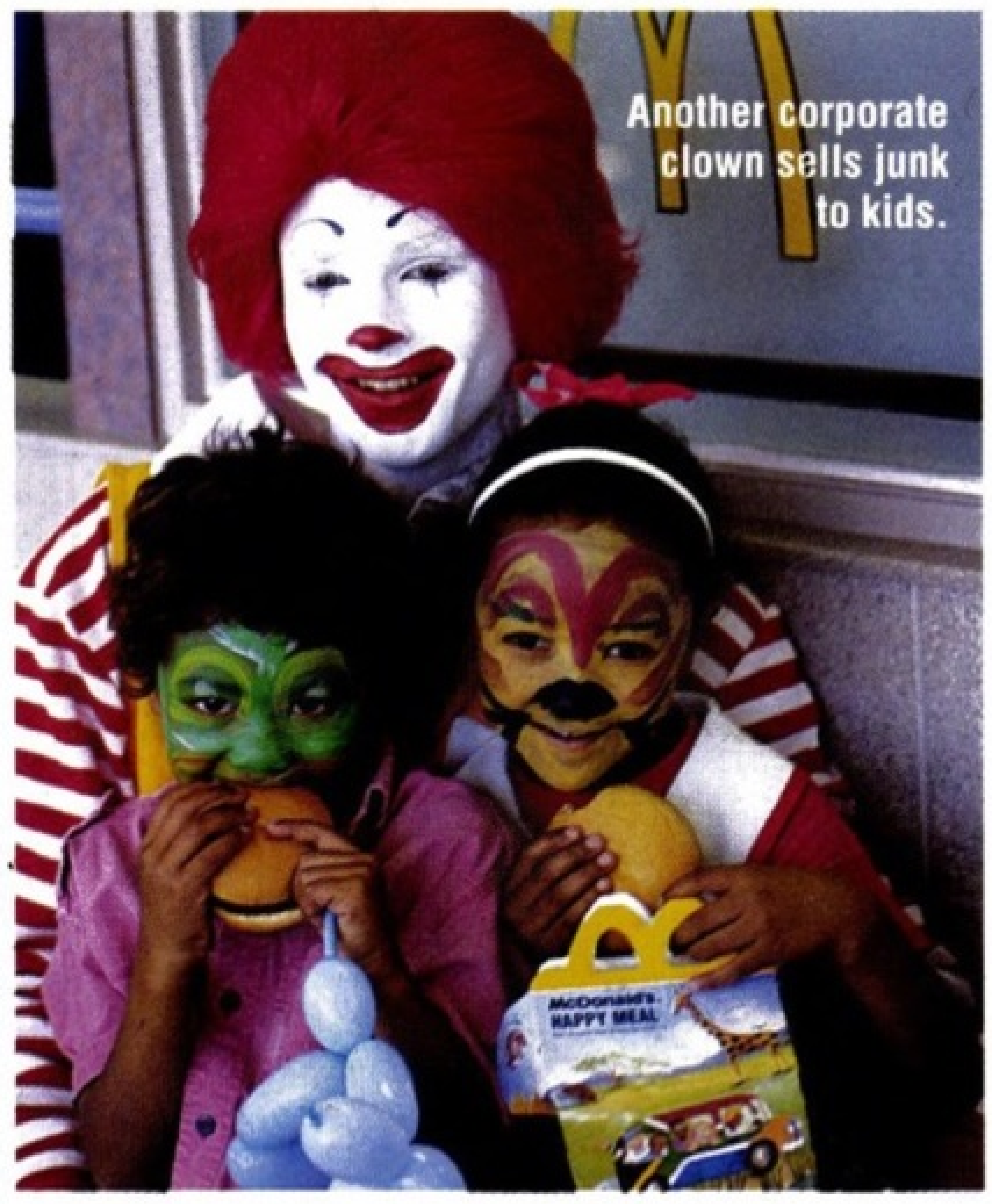
Now an MOU has been signed between the Innu Nation, Labrador Inuit Association and the federal and provincial governments. This recognizes that the two aboriginal groups had never lost the title to their traditional land and must be involved in the assessment process for mining plans. After deliberations, a panel including native representatives ultimately recommended that the mine proceed, as long as 106 other recommendations were implemented. Innu Nation President David Nuke says: 'The full involvement of the Innu Nation in developing the process and appointing the Panel made a real difference in how this process was perceived in our communities. The Innu people are very pleased that the Panel not only listened to us, but heard what we had to say.'

Transcripts of the public hearings and the complete panel report can be found on the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency website: www.ceaa.gc.ca
Further information is found on the Innu Nation website: www.innu.ca

Former Ronald McDonald is out for revenge

A former Ronald McDonald of Canada, Geoffrey Giuliano, has quit his job feeling that he is not 'McDonalized' enough to continue. He publicly apologized for participating in the campaign to hook North America's youth on McDonald's food which he feels is contrary to the purpose of life. Initiation into Hindu religion and vegetarianism led Giuliano to quit the job, he says. Instead, he plans to create a new non-profit character promoting non-violence and vegetarianism and to write a book on his McDonald's experience titled *Confessions of a Corporate Clown.*

Down to Earth Vol 8 No 3


Another corporate clown sells junk to kids.

ERIC MILLER / PANOS

Atoll of accidents

The US Army's Johnston Atoll Chemical Disposal System on a tiny atoll between Hawaii and the Marshall Islands will be closed down. But the clean-up costs are considerable. A nuclear missile failed to lift off from the Johnston pad and exploded scattering non-critical plutonium along a thousand-metre length of shoreline. Over 25,000 50-gallon steel drums of Agent Orange were stored and destroyed on Johnston Atoll leaving a dangerous residue of dioxin. Also a large tank of diesel has been leaking into the atoll. The Honolulu City Council protested in 1997 that Johnston's operation record had been 'marred by numerous accidents, including fires, explosions and releases of dangerous nerve agents'. Washington promised to close the facility by 2000 and destroy the remaining chemical weapons in the US. The US army has said it will stay on the island for another year to restore the land to 'a condition that will not harm future inhabitants'.

Pacific Islands Monthly Vol 69 No 5

Hard day's work

Over one million work-related deaths occur annually and hundreds of millions of workers suffer from workplace accidents and occupational exposure to hazardous substances worldwide. Jukka Takala Chief of the International Labour Organization's (ILO) Health and Safety Programme says that more people die at work than from road accidents, war, violence and HIV/AIDS. A quarter of the deaths are due to exposure to hazardous substances. And work-related deaths are expected to double by 2020.

Working children are particularly affected – 12 million children are involved in accidents every year, around 12,000 of them fatal. The ILO says: 'While it is impossible to place a value on human life, compensation figures indicate that approximately four per cent of the world's gross domestic product (GDP) disappears with the cost of diseases through absences from work, treatment for sickness, disability and survivor benefits.' The GDP lost in work-related injuries and diseases is more than the total GDP of Africa, the Arab States and South Asia and equals more money than all the aid to the Majority World.

Go Between No 75

Quote

'Unfortunately, as police, we wear uniforms and the criminals always spot us.'

District Head of Police Francisco Luna, offering an explanation for rising crime rates in Mexico City.

Banana split

The gloves are off and the unholy spat to gain control over the world banana trade keeps getting bloodier by the minute. **David Ransom** takes a ringside seat.

Taking aim: Irvince Auguiste in Dominica (see page 15) is up against the odds.

ALL PHOTOS BY DAVID RANSOM UNLESS OTHERWISE CREDITED

WHAT do chandeliers, pecorino cheese, bed linen without embroidered borders, plastic-coated handbags, biscuits, cashmere sweaters, coffee- or tea-makers (excepting those from Italy), Carl H Lindner Jnr and truffles have in common? You've guessed it. Bananas.

All of these items – except bananas and Mr Lindner – are among European Union exports that have, at one time or another, been threatened by the US Government with punitive import tariffs worth about $500 million. This is where bananas and Mr Lindner come in. He heads the American Financial Group, which includes among its assets Chiquita Brands International of Cincinnati – a major banana-producing corporation. He says $500 million is what he's owed on account of the European banana 'regime' (more on that in a minute), and he wants the US Government to get it back for him. Curious to find the US Government employed as a private debt collector for Mr Lindner, but there it is.

Evidently, Carl H Lindner Jnr is a man of substance. His personal wealth is estimated at $830 million, much of it dredged from the murky waters of Savings and Loans institutions in the US. A strict Baptist who never drinks, smokes or swears, he has a habit of handing out little white cards with gold-embossed aphorisms on them, such as: 'I like to do my giving while I'm living so I know where it's going.' Though he prefers the Republicans and lent Robert Dole a corporate jet during the 1996 presidential campaign, when he saw the electoral tide flowing towards the Democrats he slipped Bill Clinton a quick $500,000.

'The hapless, unblemished, tasteless, erotic fruit is conjured into an image that people wish to consume in ever-increasing billions'

A few days later the Banana War between the US Government and the European Union, that had been simmering away for years, duly boiled over. If, as a result of it, Mr Lindner gets even a small part of what he reckons he's owed, he will have made a handsome return on his investment in Bill Clinton.[1]

Bent business

Welcome, then, to the warped world of bananas. Or rather, to the bent business of international trade in bananas. There is a difference. For the Banana War is officially being waged between two regions – the US and Europe – that do not actually grow bananas. Brazil and India, on the other hand, where more bananas are grown than anywhere else, are scarcely involved in the international trade at all.

Almost everywhere in the tropics the fruit of the Earth's largest herb has been adopted by small farmers as a prolific source of nutritious food. The banana, *Musa sapiculum*, is a remarkable plant that is structured like a giant leek. There are many varieties of it, which are grown in a myriad of settings, from a few plants for household consumption to plots for local markets. They grow fast; the stem dies back once the fruit is harvested, but already the next 'follower' shoot is preparing to take over. Carefully tended, on the right soil, in the right climate and with minimal inputs, a plot of a couple of acres can produce several bunches, with 100 to 200 bananas on each of them, every week, all year round, for 30 years.

Less than a quarter of all the world's bananas ever get mixed up in international trade, and it's only when they do that they encounter the banana business, where things can get a bit bent. Just one variety, Dwarf Cavendish or Gran Enano, is currently preferred. On plantations across Central America, Ecuador and Colombia, Africa and parts of Asia, vast numbers of clones are planted out on flat land swept by hurricanes which frequently blow them over. The deforested ground on which they grow is drained and degraded. They are subjected to ceaseless treatment by toxic fertilizers, herbicides, insecticides, and fungicides sprayed from the air by daredevil pilots. Their unripe fruit are cut green, fragile and inedible, from the stem, the bunches strung like slaughtered animals on cableways that carry them off for scrubbing and spraying with more chemicals. Graded and packed into boxes, dispatched in refrigerated (reefer) ships to Europe and North America, the hapless, unblemished, tasteless, erotic fruit is then ripened for superstores and conjured into an image of 'quality' that, the record shows, people in blissful ignorance of the truth wish to consume in ever-increasing billions.

This is the 'dollar' banana that accounts for 80 per cent of the fruit we eat in the North and is controlled by just three companies; Chiquita, Dole and Del Monte. They in turn are subsidiaries of conglomerates, like Mr Lindner's American Financial Group. Together, the 'Big Three' constitute an oligopoly that controls the supply of bananas, fixes prices – there is no 'world price' – and has an inordinate love of secrecy.

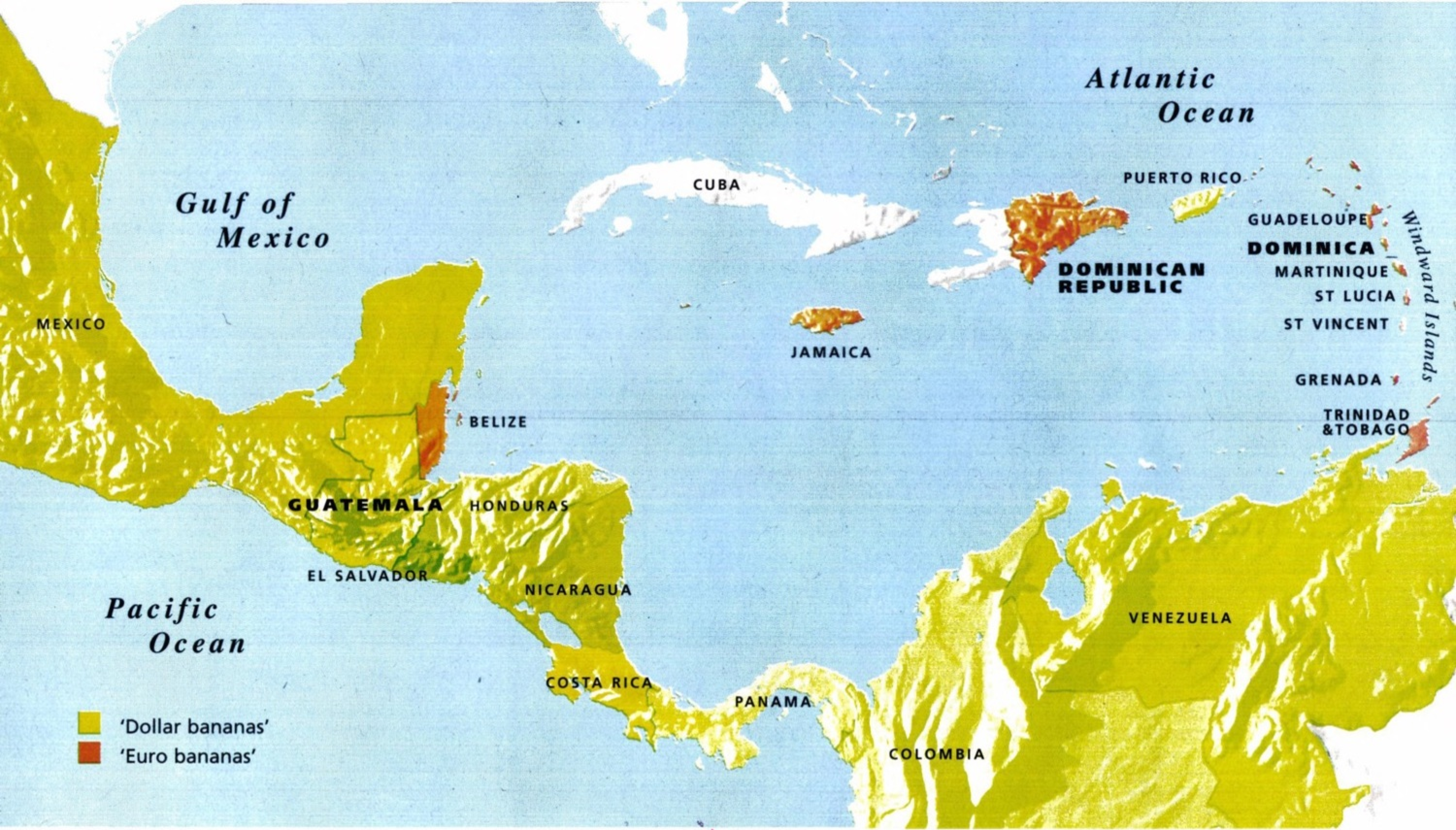
When, in May 1998, the *Cincinnati Enquirer* had the temerity to publish an

JEREMY HORNER / PANOS PICTURES

JULIO ETCHART / STILL PICTURES

Open the box! Banana trucks conceal more than they reveal – poison, slavery and environmental destruction (below); carrying off the carcasses (inset).

Chiquita
CBFU 340140 2
US 9232



Bananaland and the Yellow-Skin Road. The journey I'm taking goes from Guatemala to Dominica and the Dominican Republic.

exposé of how Chiquita actually operates, the company sued. The newspaper issued an abject apology, paid Chiquita an undisclosed sum, a journalist was sacked and prosecuted and the reports removed from the *Enquirer's* website.[2] You bet, the 'Big Three' are not to be messed with.

On the other side of the Banana War is Europe and its import 'regime'. In a Byzantine web of quotas, licences and tariffs, the European Union – the world's largest importer – still protects the banana industries of its former colonies. These are grouped into the ACP (Africa, Caribbean, Pacific) countries to which Europe made firm commitments in the Lomé Convention of 1975, subsequently renewed three times and due for another review in 2000. Though a small proportion of European imports, banana exports are critical to a number of ACP economies, and particularly to the Windward Islands of Dominica, St Lucia and St Vincent, in the East Caribbean. Growers here are paid roughly double the price, and incur roughly three times the production costs, of the 'dollar' banana.

Battling Chiquita

The Banana War is an attempt by the Big Three, and Chiquita in particular, to get their hands on this lucrative business; to remove quota restrictions and cut the tariffs they must pay, thereby cutting the price paid to ACP producers and putting them out of business. Those $500 million in punitive tariffs are what Mr Lindner reckons he has lost because he hasn't quite managed this yet – or, to put it another way, the profits he would have made if he had.

In 1995 the brand-new World Trade Organization (WTO) began to implement the no-less Byzantine rules that emerged from the Uruguay Round of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT). The WTO is empowered not merely to oversee the new rules, but to enforce them. In principle these favour free trade, though in practice – and short of self-interest – no-one quite knows what this means. The 'protectionist' European banana regime could, however, be made to look silly by even the dumbest of lawyers. So, with the US and 'dollar' banana governments in tow, Chiquita seized its chance and went into battle.

However, the Banana War is not just about bananas. Much bigger fish are frying: the relative power of governments, nations, trading blocks and corporations; the structure, control and profitability of industrial agriculture; the Common Agricultural Policy of the European Union; the fate of small-island economies; the booty of 'free trade'. In the form of the Banana War the WTO has merely been given its first trial as the High Court of Globalization. If this means anything other than the interests of corporate oligopolies like the Big Three, then the deliberations of the WTO have yet to suggest what it might be.

'In the form of the Banana War the World Trade Organization has been given its first trial as the High Court of Globalization'

In the meantime, and in the truly dreadful plantations of Central America, or on the precipitate slopes of Caribbean islands, the lives of many thousands of people who work for bananas hang in the balance. They have been here before. In fact, they have rarely been anywhere else. What do *they* think? How do *they* feel?

This is the story of a journey I made to find out. Along the way, in three very distinctive places, I discovered something I would not otherwise have known. It became clear to me that the Banana War is being waged between two equally discredited protagonists. On the one hand, in the form of the European regime, colonialism; on the other, in the form of the 'dollar' regime, plantation slavery and florid ecological insanity.

The fact that the rulings of the WTO have favoured the latter over the former, the insane over the historically outdated, is regrettable and possibly catastrophic in its effect. But neither of these two relics has anything useful to tell us about the century – let alone millennium – that is now upon us, which they cannot conceivably survive. So what will replace them? Is there any trace, somewhere in the Byzantine regulations and toxic clouds, of a sustainable future? Well yes, as a matter of fact there is – and I've tasted it. ■

---

[1] *The Guardian*, 7 March 1999; *Cincinnati Enquirer*, 18 January 1999; *Frontline*, http://www2.pbs.org [2] The reports made use of the company's internal voice-mail, which was ruled illegal in the US. The remarkable work of Mike Gallagher and Cameron McWhirter should still be accessible on http://members.xoom.com/elmsford/chiquita.txt and doubtless elsewhere too.

Into the dead zone

In Central American bananaland the Companies lay down the law – while plantation workers dodge pot-shots and poison.

The ticket collector is determined to squash the mosquito. He's chasing it across the cracked windshield of yet another hand-me-down American school bus as it rattles out of Puerto Barrios, on the Caribbean coast of Guatemala. Why should this look so odd? We are, after all, in a tropical swamp, where you can expect to get eaten alive by mosquitoes and there's not much point in taking the trouble to kill a single one. Yet I haven't been bitten once. And there are no birds. There is, in point of fact, little evidence of life of any kind.

Except, that is, for bananas. Countless thousands of them. Mile upon endless mile, lining the roadside in numbered squares; the serried ranks of some misplaced army kitted out in daft uniforms of waving green headgear and ramrod trunks, holding out white plastic bags that flap like banners in the turgid breeze. Featureless terrain, where rivers run high between dikes and land lies low in a grid of drainage ditches. A land of mighty investments and grand designs, where the bones of thousands who once laboured to make it so lie rotting in the ground.

This is the Guatemalan territory of Chiquita Brands of Cincinnati, a direct descendant of the United Fruit Company. They used to call this company *el pulpo*, the octopus, because its tentacles reached into every crevice of Guatemalan life. Established in 1899, United Fruit pioneered the plantation system of banana cultivation and by 1949 owned 3.5 million acres of land in Jamaica, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Panama, Honduras, Nicaragua and Colombia. Its largest domain, however, was in Guatemala, where it owned Puerto Barrios as well as every mile of railroad in the country.

In 1954 United Fruit – guided by legendary PR man Edward Bernays – orchestrated US support for the overthrow of the elected Guatemalan Government of Jacobo Arbenz, which intended to expropriate 400,000 acres of its land and support the demands of banana workers for improved pay and conditions. Violent repression ensued and has plagued the country ever since. Anxious to distance itself from accusations that United Fruit were dictating US foreign policy, in 1958 the US Government eventually began a federal anti-trust suit against United Fruit's banana monopoly, and the company was broken up. Chiquita Brands, Dole Food Company and Del Monte Fresh Produce, the 'Big Three' banana companies of today, are its offspring and you can still see the family resemblance all too clearly.[1]

Alabama and Arizona

Feliciano sits beside me on the bus. He is taking care of me, though I'm not entirely sure who is looking after him, an active trade unionist in a place where this is a perilous thing to be. Gentle and attentive, he has agreed to show me something of what life is like on the banana plantations today. His family has worked for bananas for 60 years: his father 'retired' to a smallholding and absolute poverty some time ago, but all his brothers still work on the plantations. And his young children? Will they follow in the family footsteps? Feliciano looks at me with the eyes of one who fears they might – that the future could resemble the past and a present he wishes to change.

The bus slows to a halt. Suddenly a man in a stained vest, seated on a broomstick, hurtles out of the banana plants to one side of us, floats across the road in front of us and disappears into the plants on the other side. The ticket collector, who has killed the mosquito, descends from the bus and pushes back an overhead rail so that we can proceed. In due course we catch up with the man on the broomstick, punting rhythmically through the banana plants with two poles, flying along the cableway that was made to carry off their fruit, into spotlights of burning sunlight like Tinkerbell across a stage set for Peter Pan.

'Stop the bus! We're getting off!' cries Feliciano, some way further on. 'I thought there was no-one left on the Alabama and Arizona plantation. Let's go and talk to them.'

We're left in front of a large, dark barn of corrugated iron, its skirts lifted from the ground for ventilation. Inside there are empty concrete tanks, benches of steel rollers, archaeological remains with mysterious functions. There is a wooden table, into which have been etched in ink the squares of a chess board. From here, Octaviano and Guillermo are watching us guardedly as we approach.

'Alabama and Arizona,' says Feliciano. 'The *finca* [literally 'farm', but better translated here as 'plantation'] that belongs to Victor Manuel Morales Haussler.'

Feliciano explains to me that Chiquita has tried to escape responsibility for the conditions on its plantations by using local companies as cover. This is part of a much wider pattern of commodity corporations offloading the big risks and low profits of production on to smaller local businesses. But no-one's fooled. Chiquita bought all the bananas from Alabama and Arizona. In the packing plant they've left behind a large poster bearing their instructions to the workers, imperious and dusty.

'We are totally destitute,' says Octaviano. '*Totally* destitute. We have nothing good to eat or drink. They cut off the electricity and the water. We have to raise drinking water from wells. It is polluted. We're being poisoned.' From the tremor in his voice I sense the frustrated force of a story that has been told too often to little effect. Beside him, an old man listens, motionless. 'Well, we're just sitting here. Waiting. There used to be more than two hundred of us, men, women and children. But some have drifted away. There's about a hundred of us left. Like I said, we're just waiting.'

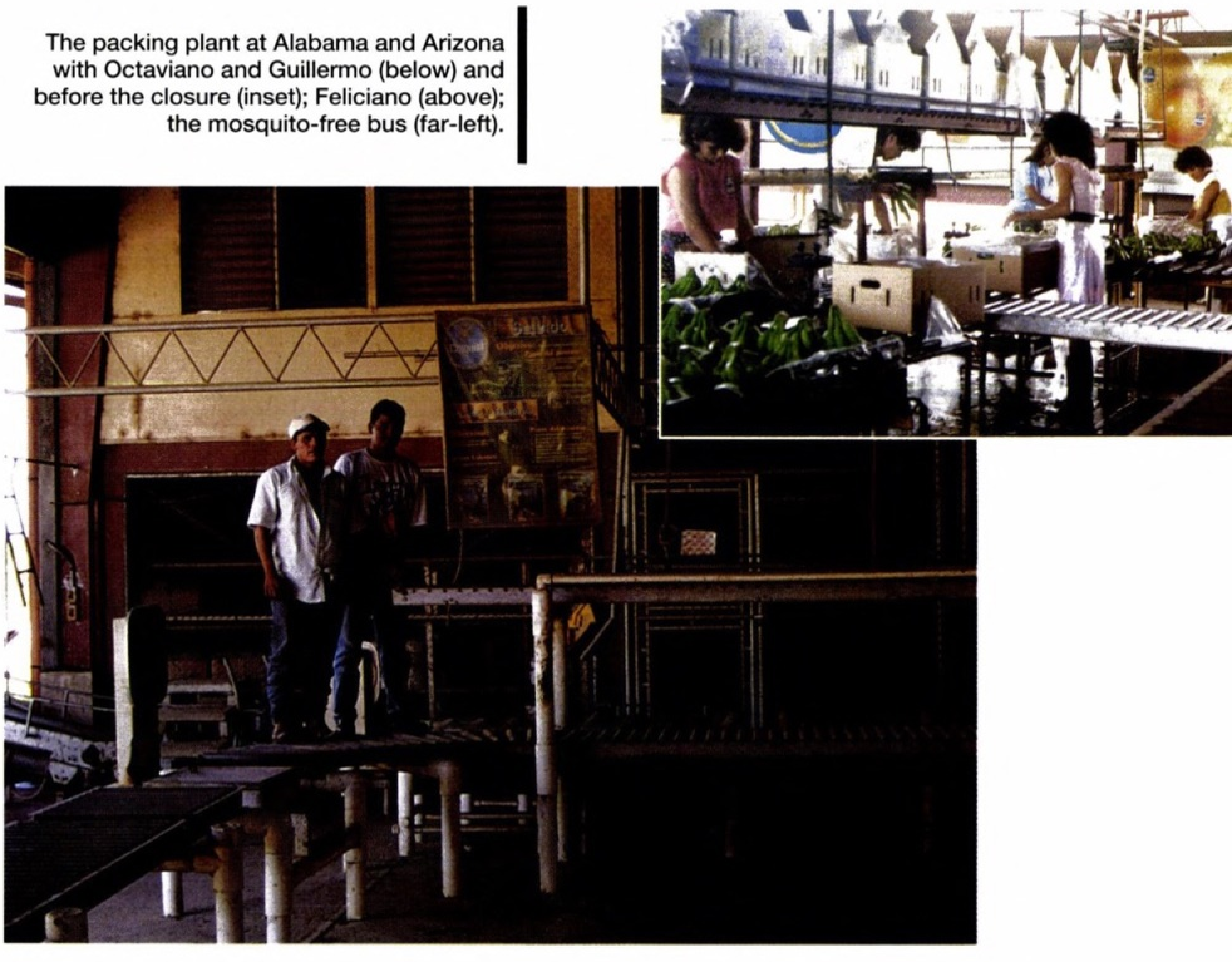
'For what?' I ask.

'For something to happen,' says Octaviano.

Foul legacy

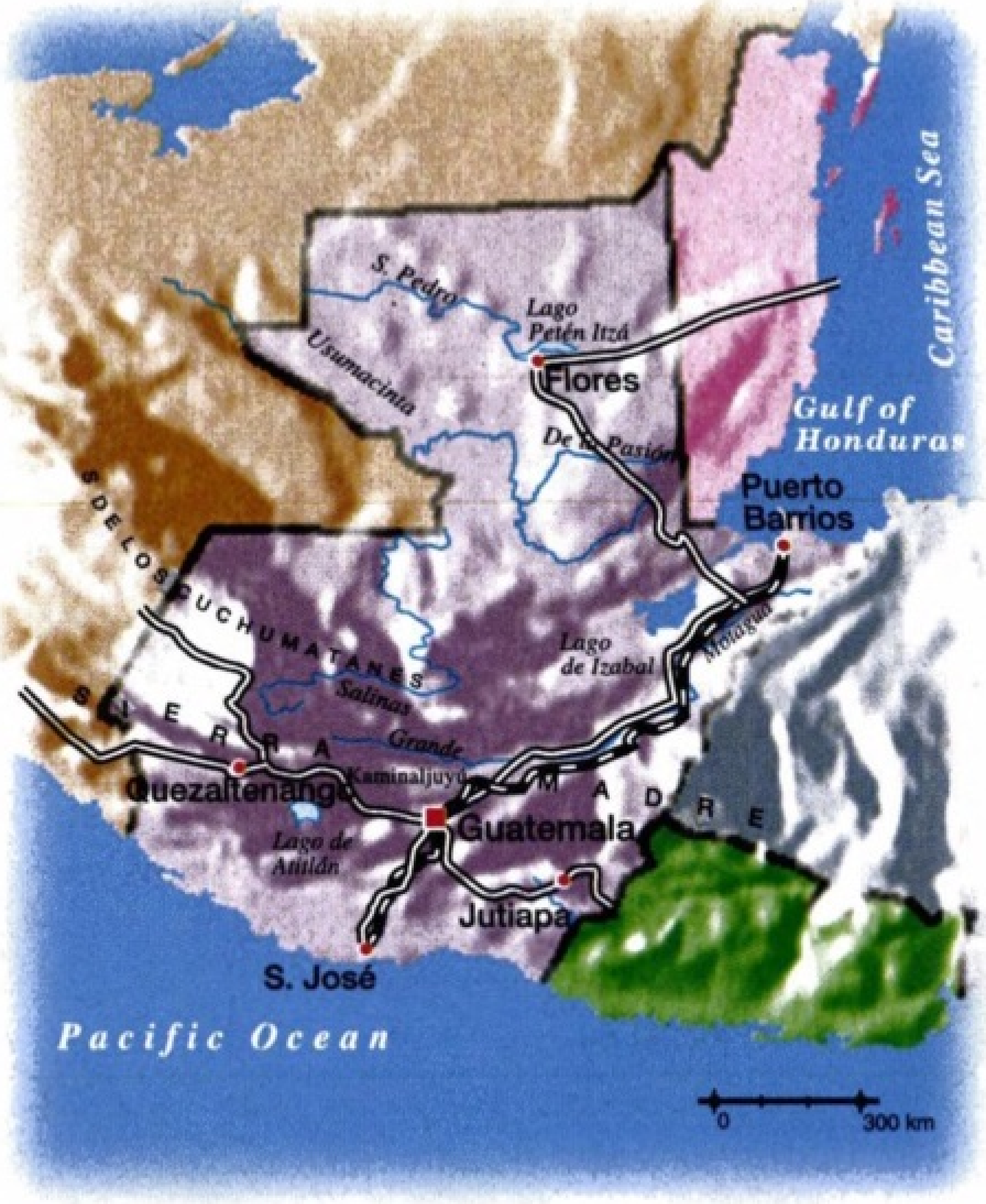
'It began with the women,' interrupts Guillermo, suddenly animated. 'The way they were treated. They were the ones working here in the packing plant. They had to use chemicals that made them sick, in the washing tanks, gave them sores on their feet. All times of the day, and late into the night too. Many of them are single mothers, and they weren't even allowed to breastfeed their children. Well, it got to the point where we weren't prepared to put up with it any more.'

'The only way to protect ourselves was with a union,' says Octaviano. 'There were lots of rumours flying around. The company was getting jumpy. Part of the plantation is on the other side of the river, and there's a bridge across it for the cableway, which we had to use to get to work. They came with armed guards and dogs to



The packing plant at Alabama and Arizona with Octaviano and Guillermo (below) and before the closure (inset); Feliciano (above); the mosquito-free bus (far-left).

UNSITRAGUA



Guatemala snapshot
Population: 11 million
Infant mortality rate: 43 per 1,000 live births
Illiteracy rate: male 26%, female 41% of people aged 15 and above
Average income (GNP per capita): $1,580
Exports of goods and services: $3,186 million
Exports of bananas: $151 million; 659,392 metric tons
Sources: World Bank Country Data; FAO data.
All figures are for 1997

stop us crossing it, to split us up. So we were forced to use small boats. The river is very dangerous. Sometimes the guards would shoot into the water, trying to scare us. And then we were all sacked, with almost a week's wages still owing to us. The company has broken the labour laws of this country. The Government should be enforcing the law, but it doesn't. The courts are always on the side of the companies. We've been waiting to be reinstated ever since.'

'When did this happen?' I ask.

'February,' says Guillermo.

'Six months ago?' I ask with alarm.

'*Eighteen* months ago,' says Octaviano.

He takes me out behind the packing plant. There are three lines of wooden barracks. Most of them are shut up, but children tumble from one open door, and as we walk around the back we meet the community that remains, gathered in the shade of a few trees. An old man swings in a hammock, reading a book. Octaviano shows me the appalling sanitary conditions and the two wells, saturated with toxic chemicals from the surrounding plantations.

A few miles further down the road we enter a village where a thousand people live – the families of the workers on Finca La Inca, at the end of the bus route and almost into Honduras. Stunted trees and mean little hutches line the only street, where the prevailing colour, freshly painted, is a distinctive shade of blue – Pepsi label blue. As Feliciano and I stroll through the village we are followed by a man in uniform carrying a pump-action shotgun. Crawling behind him is a Pepsi delivery truck. It used to be raided by children under contract to Pepsi bootleggers. In Guatemala, value is signified by the size of the weapons touted around it.

We first see Francisco sitting outside his house as his two small daughters play around him. He's on the executive of the Finca La Inca union, which is recognized by the company. Reluctantly and slowly, The Big Three have been recognizing trade unions on some of the *fincas* they control. Feliciano believes that improving international links between banana unions in the early 1990s had a marked effect. Guatemalan labour law, however, permits the formation of unions only in individual companies. So there are many small unions here, one for every unionized *finca* of 200-or-so workers, and communication between them is difficult.

Strongarm tactics

Francisco, Feliciano and I sit down. There are only two chairs, so Francisco squeezes himself into his child's chair which cracks ominously under his weight. We are joined by Ubaldo, an immense and powerful man just in from an eight-hour shift on the plantation. He is plainly exhausted, and sinks into a tiny hammock strung between two trees. We talk about the difficulties they face.

Their 'wages' average $0.63 an hour, $28 a week. Fixed almost three years ago, the rate was due for review in August. But the companies have made full use of Hurricane Mitch, the terrible storm that hung over the region for four days last October. Though the devastation and death toll in Guatemala did not reach the same levels as in neighbouring Honduras, still the rivers here ripped away bridges and filled houses with silt, flooding banana plantations along their banks. The companies extended the wage agreement and sacked 'redundant' union members, claiming the damage done by Mitch as the reason.

At COBSA (a front company for Dole) they went one stage further. Members of the 'yellow' company union were induced to make legal complaints against the independent trade union, claiming its members were responsible for 'damages and prejudice' valued at $7.5 million in the wake of Mitch. Armed guards with dogs stripped the roofs off their houses to force them to leave the *finca.* The courts duly issued *ordenes de captura* (arrest warrants) against 150 union members. Most are still in hiding, though among those arrested was a union lawyer in Guatemala City. It says little for the case against him – or any of the others – that his passport proved he had been in Britain attending an international conference at the time the 'damages' were alleged to have taken place.

Just before I arrive in Puerto Barrios there has been a big demonstration, and scrawled on a wall are the words 'we are workers, not criminals'.

Along the roads are posted 'Notices to the Public' warning against entering the plantations while aerial fumigation is taking place. The Big Three routinely claim that they do not fumigate when workers are in the plantations. Feliciano, Francisco and Ubaldo laugh heartily at the claim. If the workers got out every time aerial fumigation took place there'd be no bananas cut at all.

'It's not so bad in the mornings,' says Ubaldo. 'But as the heat increases these foul-smelling chemicals seem to rise up in the air, you have to inhale them and you begin to feel nauseous and have

UNSITRAGUA

Guarding the bridge between Alabama and Arizona (below); Ubaldo and Francisco (top right, opposite page).

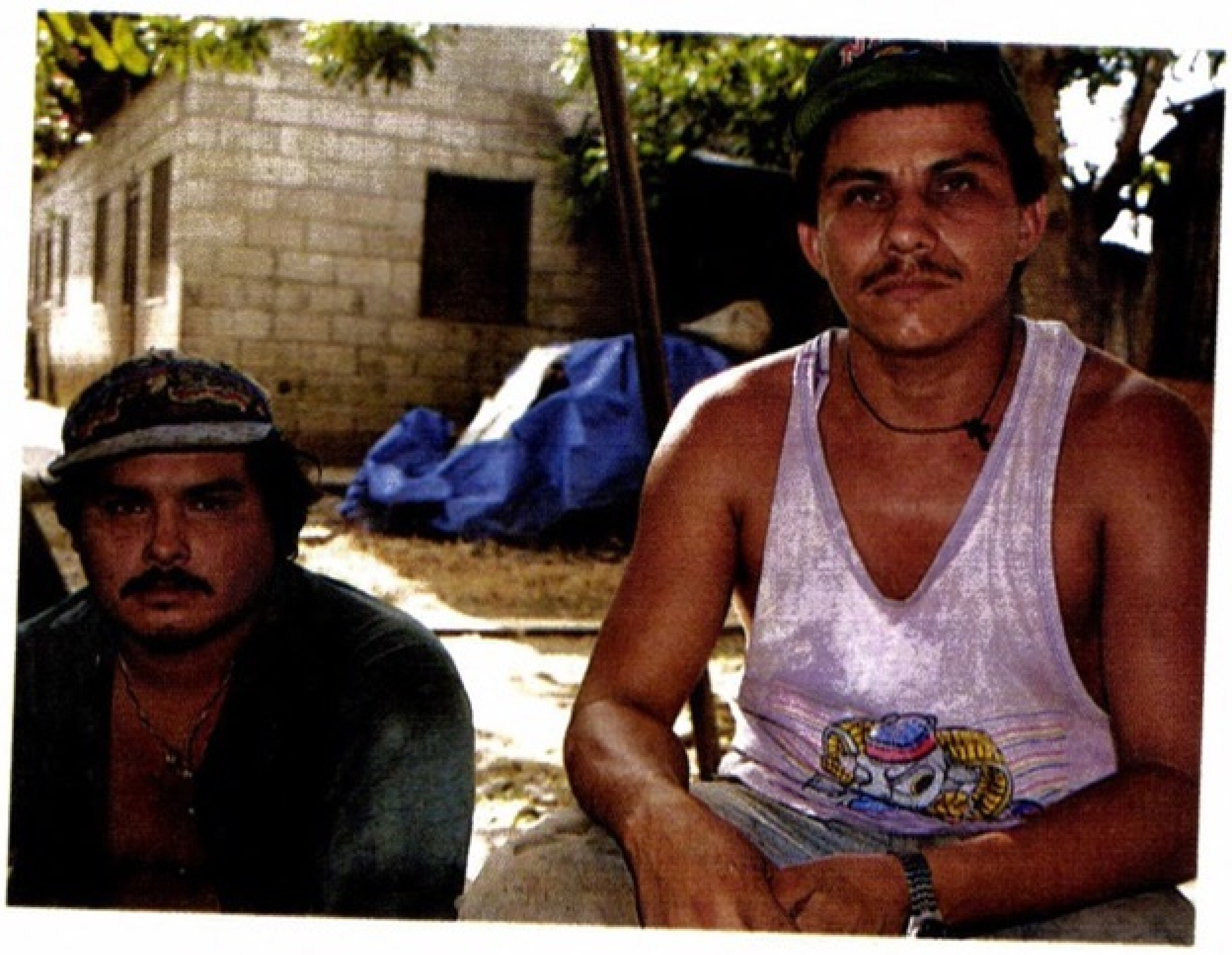
difficulty breathing.'

'The company doctor doesn't have any specialist knowledge about their effect,' adds Francisco. 'I myself was beginning to have nose bleeds and trouble with my eyes. So I went to the doctor who said there was nothing wrong with me. We're always asking for protective clothing. They keep saying "soon". It's hard to imagine anything that would be both effective and bearable in this heat.'

I ask what the chemicals are. They do not know. Francisco fetches a wad of blue plastic strips. These are sometimes placed around the stems of the bunches as a substitute for the intensely toxic concentrations in the plastic bags used to protect the growing fruit. He asks me to smell them. There is a deep foulness to the odour. We wrap one of them up. I'll try to find out what it is, and let them know.[2]

Prayers in darkness

Feliciano has given me a copy of the *pacto colectivo*, the union agreement they fought long and hard to achieve at the Pamaxan plantation, where he works. On the face of it, this is a benign document granting the union formal recognition. But as I read through it I am astonished. There are clauses regulating almost every aspect of their daily lives; not just working conditions and pay, but schools, healthcare, water and electricity supplies, housing, cooking equipment, transport, recreation facilities, books for the union library, football shirts, the annual number of basketballs the company will pay for, toys for the children, clocks.



At Finca La Inca I look around me and ask if there is anything, besides the union, that *isn't* controlled by the company.

'No,' says Francisco. 'Not apart from the Catholic Church over there.' He points to a wooden shed across the street. 'And the company refused to give them electricity. So they have to pray in the dark.'

Does he ever eat bananas?

'Good lord, no!' he says. 'People in places like this don't eat the fruit they cut. I guess we know better.'

Though the offspring of the octopus that was United Fruit have had precisely 100 years to establish a decent relationship with plantation workers, they have got precisely nowhere. From time to time they appear to adapt, to act as if they don't have to poison their employees or pay them shameful wages, but they're hooked. Always they have to pull back, resort to crude repression, because otherwise they are at risk of collapse. In truth, despite the outward appearance of a modern, efficient agricultural industry, this place is an industrial dinosaur.

All the talk of *ordenes de captura* and guns and dogs and escape into hiding brings a single word to my mind, but I have refrained from using it because of the sensitivities involved. Ubaldo's great form, exhausted but relaxed now, swings in the tiny hammock. He looks into the distance and reflects in silence.

'It's just this wretched poverty,' he says eventually. 'We cannot get away from it. You know what it is?'

'You tell me,' I say.

'Slavery,' he says.

My word exactly. ■

A dark, hard history

It is now almost three years since UN-sponsored Peace Accords were signed in Guatemala, formally bringing to an end 40 years of violent conflict which have left at least 45,000 people 'disappeared'. Everyone I spoke to expressed relief that the Accords had been agreed. But the underlying conflicts remain largely unresolved, and among these is the relentless persecution of the Guatemalan labour movement.

UNSITRAGUA, based in Guatemala City, represents some 74 member unions across a wide range of employment, from the *maquila* export-processing factories to rural workers and banana unions. As yet, it operates semi-clandestinely and its activists continue to be targets for arrest and assassination.

'We have a dark, hard history,' says Julio Coj of UNSITRAGUA. 'You could not speak or say what you felt and suffered, because you would be assassinated immediately. But we think that if we keep hiding our faces and our names, then we endorse the impunity that the Government and business sector still try to maintain.'

SINDICATO DE TRABAJADORES
UNSITRAGUA
UNION DE GUATEMALA
UNE

Julio Coj: 'You would be assassinated immediately.'

That much, he says, remains unchanged. 'We have peace on paper, not a real and concrete peace. To make that we need full respect for union rights and for collective bargaining. The Government does not play its proper role, which is to balance business and union interests. It continues to privilege big business at the expense of the majority. There needs to be a radical change of attitude in the business mentality and especially in the courts, which should uphold such meagre protection as we get from our labour laws, in conformity with the conventions of the International Labour Organization. But they remain in the pocket of big business.'

He is under no illusion about the difficulties that lie ahead. 'What matters for the workers is that the Government makes sure that all transnational companies respect the law. At the moment that's getting much more difficult, because globalization is allowing transnationals to produce what they like where they like, with no impediments. The tragedy is that this process is creating more, not less, poverty for us in Latin America.'

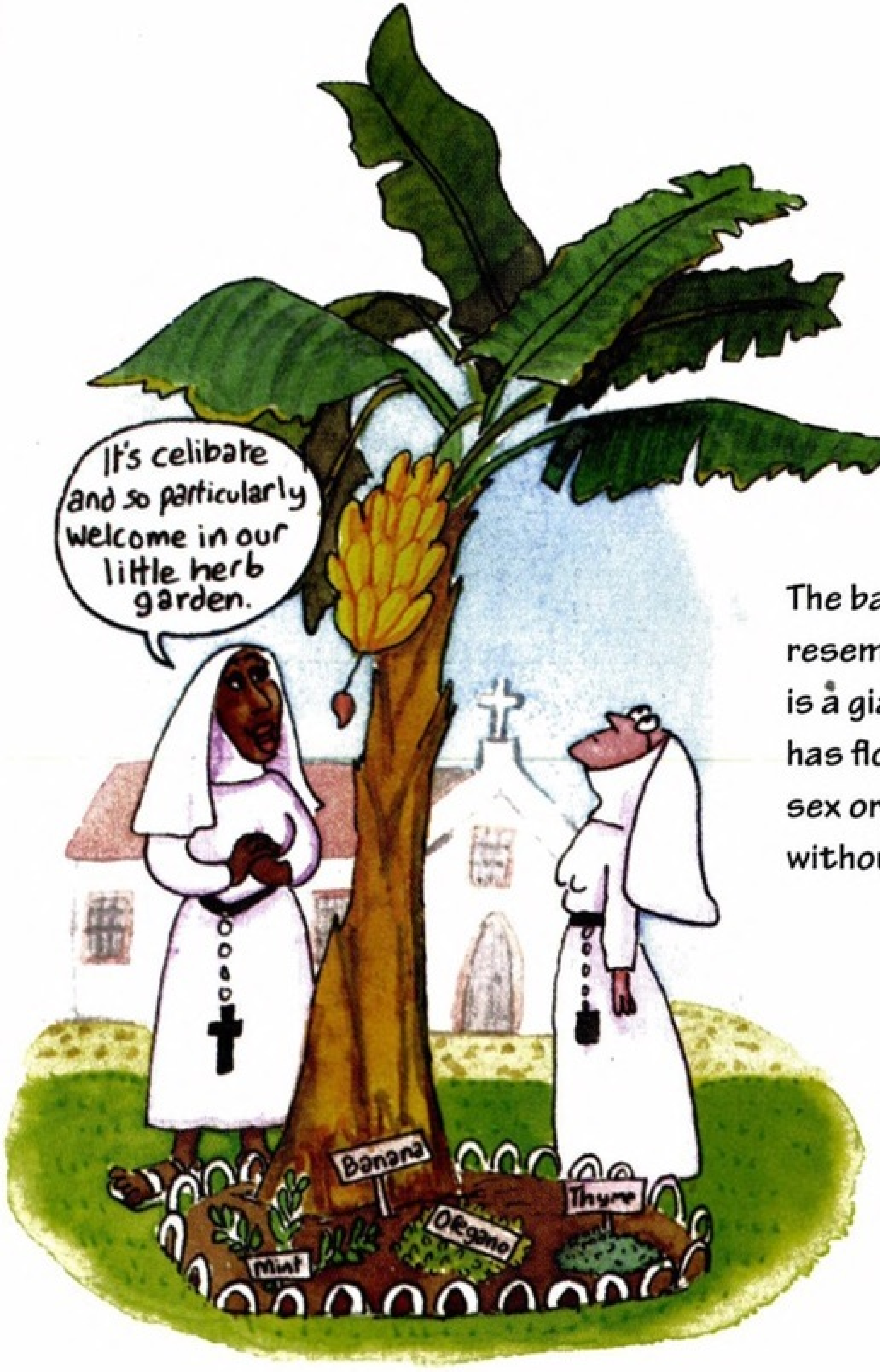
Contact UNSITRAGUA at 9a Avenida 1-43, Zona 1, Guatemala City, Guatemala, Central America,
Tel/Fax: +502 238 2272, E-mail: unsitragua@pronet.net.gt

---

1 Stephen Schlesinger and Stephen Kinzer, *Bitter Fruit: The Untold Story of the American Coup in Guatemala*, Sinclair Browne, London, 1982. **2** Almost certainly **chlorpyrifos**, an organophosphate (OP) insecticide that disrupts central nervous systems. Produced by the US multinational Dow Elanco, it is classified by the World Health Organization as Class II, or 'moderately hazardous', and is in widespread use around the world. A leading cause of acute insecticide poisoning in the US, it poses a risk of serious damage to the eyes, as well as to the health of children. Recent research has identified immune-system abnormalities following exposure. In 1997 the US Environmental Protection Agency prohibited its use in toys, domestic curtains and furniture. Source: *Active Ingredient Fact Sheet*, Pesticides Trust, London, September 1998.

And another thing...

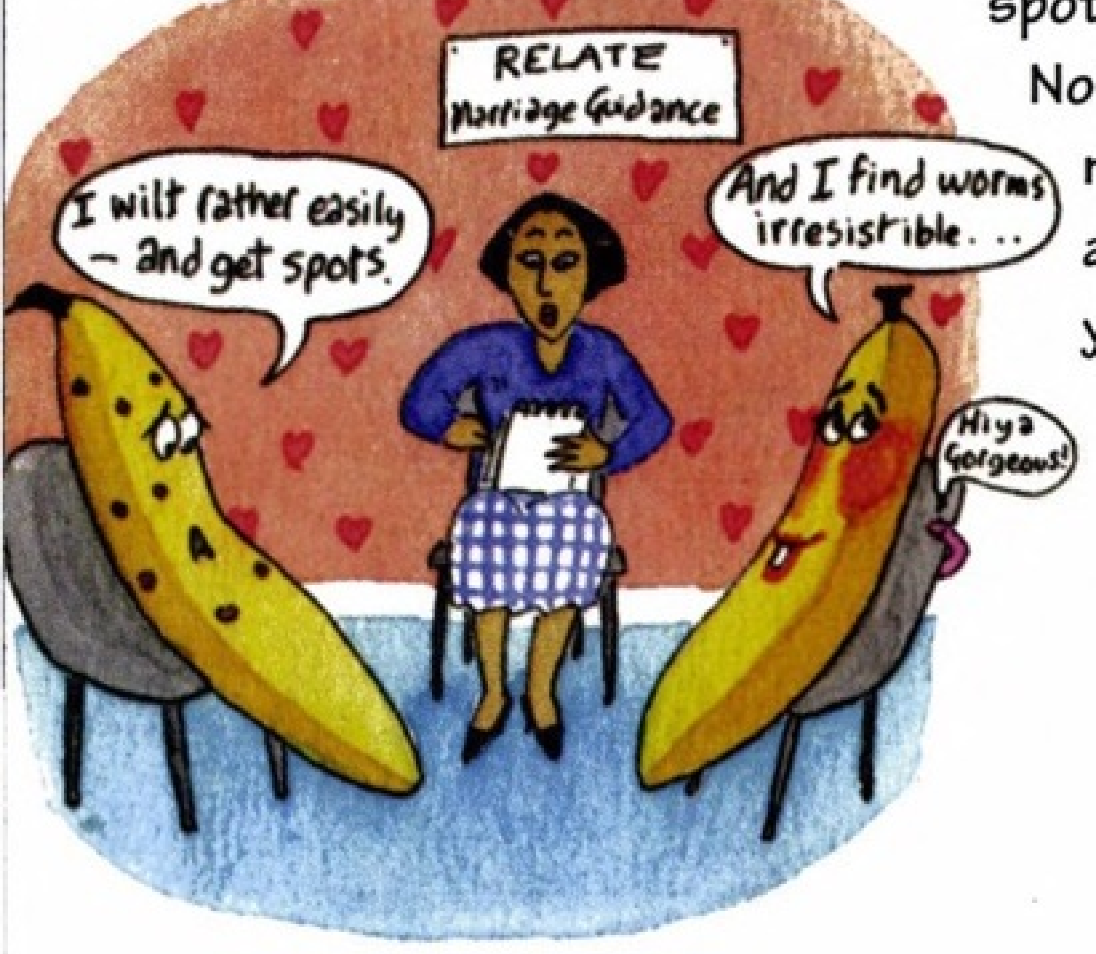
Cartoonist Viv Quillin tells you more than you really need know about bananas.


It's celibate and so particularly welcome in our little herb garden.
Banana
Oregano
Thyme
Mint

The banana resembles a tree but is a giant herb that has flowers without sex organs and fruit without seeds.

Buddha made the banana plant the symbol of the futility of earthly possessions because of its infertility. Classic Chinese iconography shows him meditating on the key to wisdom at the foot of a banana plant.

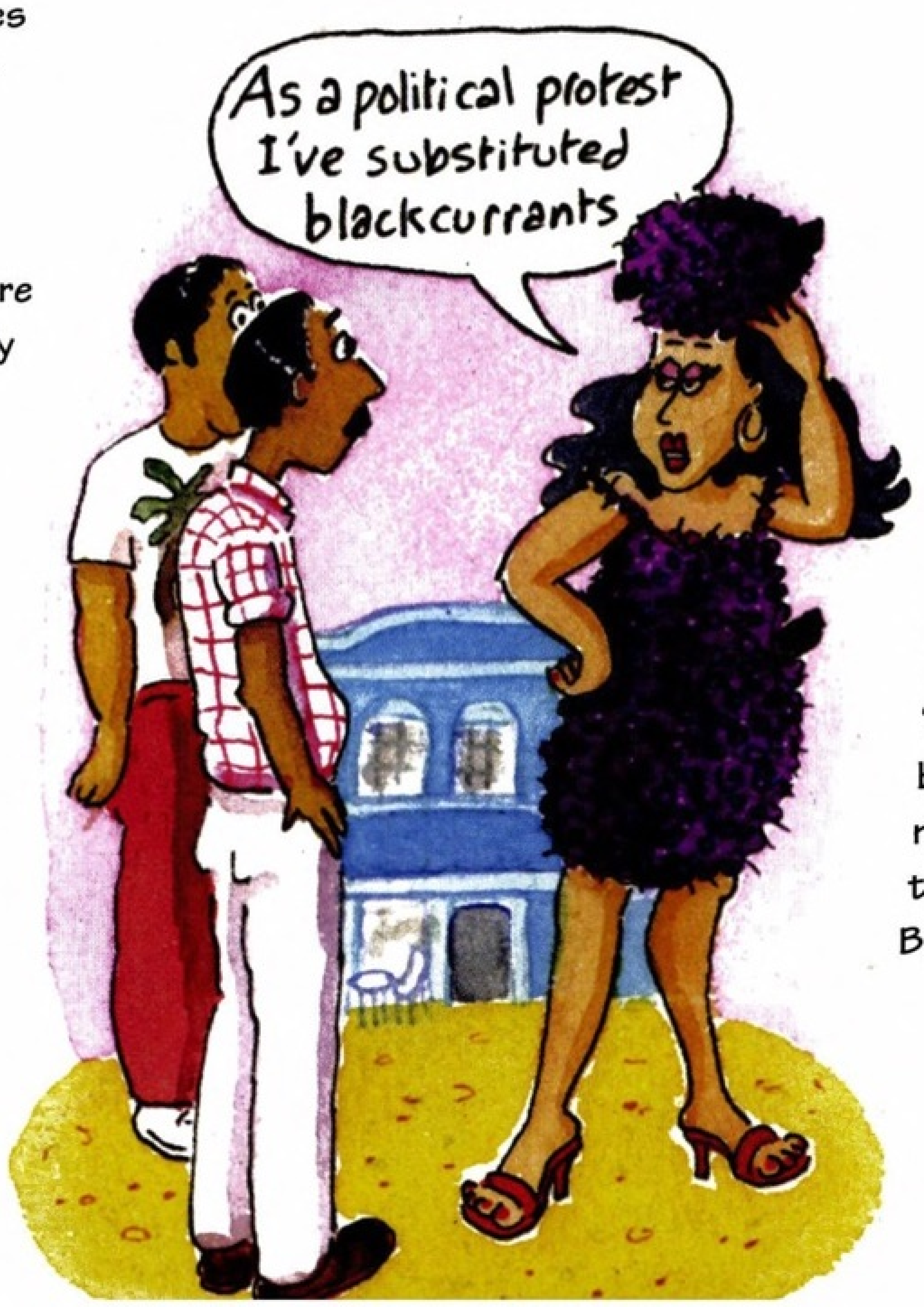
There are just two main varieties of banana consumed outside the tropics: Gros Michel is susceptible to Panama disease (wilt) and leaf spot (Sigatoga) but tolerant of the burrowing nematode worm; Cavendish is resistant to wilt but susceptible to leaf spot and worms. No variety resistant to all three has yet been discovered.


RELATE
Marriage Guidance
I wilt rather easily – and get spots.
And I find worms irresistible...
Hiya Gorgeous!

OLD
THE RIPPER

Recent excavations discovered the remains of a sixteenth-century banana in London, but for the most part the fruit was ignored in Europe until the twentieth century, since it ripened too quickly to be transported by sea.

The fruit contains large quantities of energy (90 calories per 100 grams) and potassium (380 milligrams) – one banana provides more than an adult's daily requirement.


As a political protest I've substituted blackcurrants

Singer Carmen Miranda made her name by appearing clothed in bananas, encouraging United Fruit to adopt the 'Miss Chiquita' banana-clad figure, now discredited by the antics of Chiquita Brands International.

Caught in the crossfire

Across the Caribbean to the Windward Islands, where small-scale banana growers are deserting the battle front.

'WE don't want to be in a market competing with producers like Chiquita,' says Gregory Shillingford emphatically, 'with a fruit that doesn't taste good, uses a lot of chemicals and employs slave labour. We do not want to endanger our environment. We want to promote reasonable wages for all working people and a good relationship with consumers.'

Well, if any one person in Dominica can make this happen, then I guess it has to be Gregory Shillingford. As General Manager of the Dominica Banana Marketing Corporation (DBMC) he's a key figure in the island's banana trade and carries a big responsibility on his broad shoulders. Dominicans rely very heavily on bananas, which for the past decade or so have provided some 20 per cent of Gross Domestic Product, 60 per cent of exports of goods, and the jobs of maybe 10,000 people. That's a very large chunk of the working population. Dominica, as one of the Windward Islands (the others are St Lucia, St Vincent and the Grenadines, and Grenada), has more to lose from the Banana War than almost anywhere else. So what alternatives to bananas are there? As yet there is no easy answer.

Here you do not find the kind of grinding poverty and repression so characteristic of Guatemala. Among the younger generations at least, illiteracy is virtually unknown. The banana industry began with sales to Britain in the 1950s and was developed by small farmers, providing them for the first time with a reliable weekly cash income. The industry gave birth to a generation of 'banana children' whose education was paid for by their parents' banana earnings – and who now run the country. The Prime Minister, Edison James, used to do Gregory Shillingford's job.

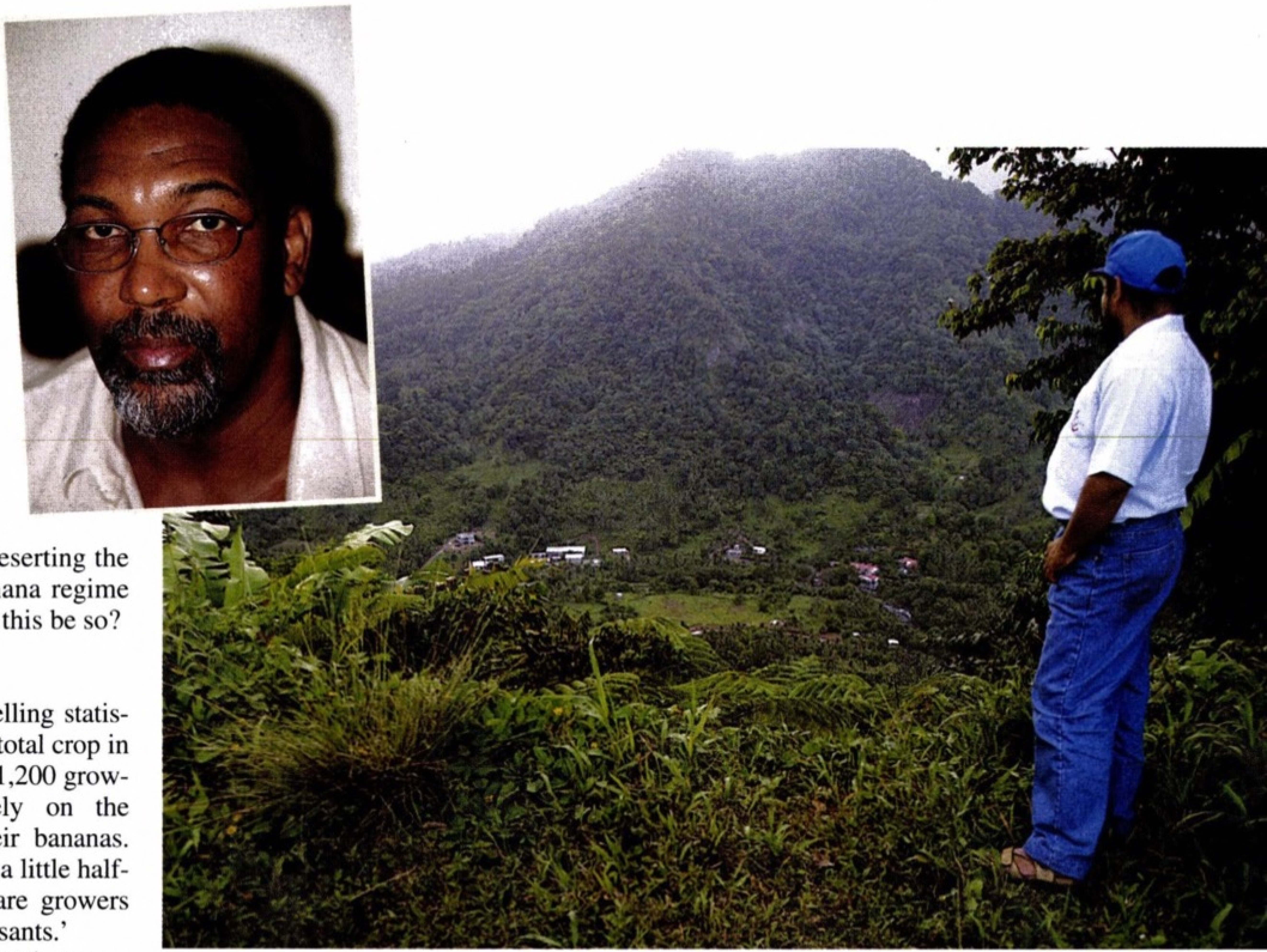
But bananas also delivered this tiny island's people into a fatal reliance on a single export crop that has now, inevitably, betrayed them. Production is in headlong decline. In the peak year of 1988, Gregory Shillingford tells me, 72,000 tons of bananas were exported from 15,000 acres of cultivation by 7,000 growers. But then falling prices, a spate of hurricanes and a more 'liberalized' single market in the European Union after 1992 all took their toll. Last year, just 28,000 tons were exported from 7,000 acres by 2,800 growers – a reduction by more than a half. In villages around the island, stores that sold basic necessities, most of them imported with

Days gone by – a banana boat loads 'green gold' at Portsmouth, Dominica.

PHILIP WOLMUTH / PANOS PICTURES

banana money, have shut.

Even so, preferential access to the European Union market continues. Between them, the Windward Islands still have an annual, duty-free quota of around 287,000 tons of bananas. Yet in some years they have used less than half of it. Growers must be either unwilling or unable to produce more bananas. They are, as it were, deserting the battlefront. If the European banana regime is such a good deal, why should this be so?



Irvince surveys his home in Carib territory (above); Gregory Shillingford (inset); Balene Fredrick in her packing shed (opposite page).

Looking for players

Gregory Shillingford quotes a telling statistic: more than 80 per cent of the total crop in Dominica now comes from just 1,200 growers. The remaining 1,600 rely on the DBMC's obligation to buy their bananas. 'We don't really mind,' he says, a little half-heartedly. 'But what we need are growers who are business people, not peasants.'

Dennis Labassiere is very much a man of business. He is also an appointed Senator and Deputy Speaker of the House of Assembly. He has a degree in business administration and spent some time in St Lucia running one of the Windward Islands' largest suppliers of boxes for cut bananas. Now he owns a large farm in the northeast of Dominica which hires labourers and has 25 irrigated acres of bananas. He is very confident, particularly that 'loyal' West Indian consumers in Europe and North America will buy his bananas. He wants to see the industry restructured, and to put an end to what he reckons is the cross-subsidizing of the worst growers by the best.

'Either you are a player or you are not,' he says. 'If you are a player, you must play by the rules of the game. That game is played on global markets, by the rules of competition. A lot of small growers can't compete.'

Short of selling their land to hotels and golf courses, changing into flunky clothes and training to be servile, it's hard to see how mass tourism will benefit many Dominicans

'What can they do, then?' I ask him.

'Get out,' he says. 'They must diversify, like me.'

He has diversified into cut flowers, which for the time being he sells on the regional market, though he would like to supply Marks and Spencer in Britain. 'When I saw the prices they fetch there, I wondered what I was doing in bananas!' he says. He has also started a pig farm, which devours reject bananas.

Small farmers who own their own land are not, however, going to 'diversify' into crops that bring a bad return, just for the hell of it. Nor are they merely a quaint feature of Dominican society. They are an expression of its history, shaping it almost entirely, giving it an idiosyncratic, stubborn, unpretentious, egalitarian, periodically febrile nature. No-one with any sense assumes that their interests can be taken lightly.

The island has the largest land area but the smallest population of all the Windward Islands. Fearsome mountain peaks, still clothed in dense rainforest, shoot straight out of the Caribbean between Martinique and Guadeloupe. There is very little flat land, so Dominica never had the large sugar plantations that fed off slavery and made fortunes for European colonists elsewhere in the region. The island gave refuge not just to the Carib peoples, who resisted European colonization for longer here than anywhere else, but to fugitive slaves ('Maroons') and indeed to fugitives of all kinds, including loyalists fleeing the American War of Independence. After abolition, former slaves simply walked off such estates as existed to clear the largest area that could be cultivated by a single family – four or five acres, perhaps – and start subsistence farming on the fertile mountain slopes.[1]

'Lots of small growers, particularly the older ones, are giving up their banana plots because it's all getting far too difficult, far too regimented,' says Irvince Auguiste, as we pass a bedraggled collection of abandoned plants on a steep hillside. For ten years Irvince was the elected Chief – 'rather like being Mayor' he says – of the Carib Territory, through which we are now driving. In 1902 some 3,000 acres on the east coast of the island were handed back by the British to the few remaining descendants of the pre-Columbian Carib peoples. Today, 3,700 of their heirs hold the same land in common, from which some 200 growers still produce bananas. They are a reminder, if one were needed, that this is a special place.

Changing times

'It used to be a much simpler thing,' continues Irvince. The contrast with Guatemala could scarcely be more stark. Everywhere, banana plants are set among coconut, cocoa, coffee and the ubiquitous forest. 'People would grow bananas and do other things as well. Now you have to keep diaries and charts and add up columns of figures and do exactly what you're told if you want to be a certified grower and get a decent price for your bananas. There's no time for anything else.

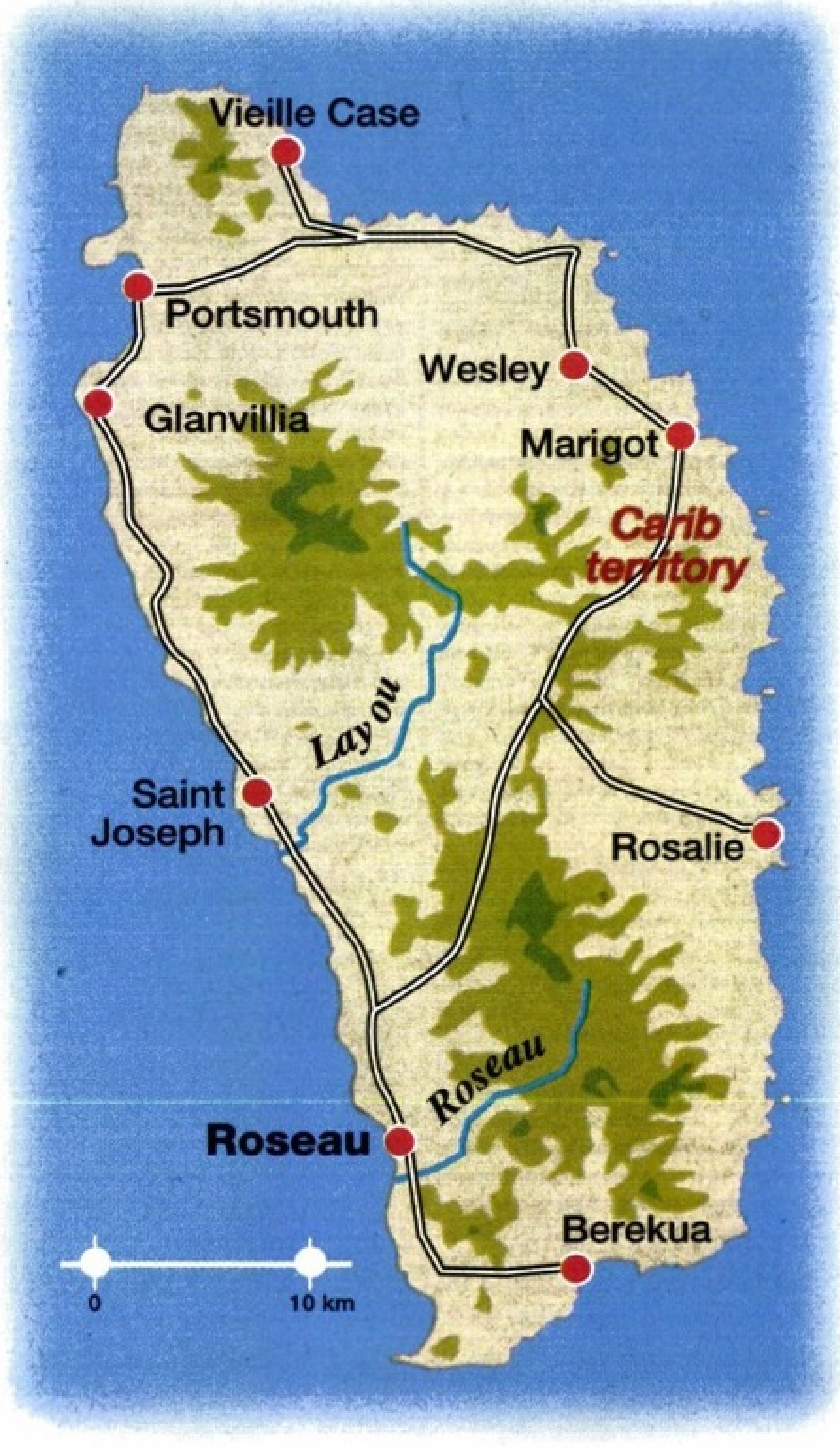
'Then you've got to be able to "bounce back" from hurricanes, which keep destroying your crop. Remember, small farmers have very little security. They can never be quite sure how good their crop will be, or when the next hurricane will strike and if there'll be a crop at all. It's not like having a regular wage and it's very easy to get into debt, because you have to invest in the crop before it is harvested.

Sometimes they abandon bananas and then, when they find they can't earn a living from anything else, go back to them again. My father grew bananas, and I carried them on my head as a boy. But I don't grow them myself. Just recently, though, I've been having second thoughts...'

A big, red, battered pickup hurtles towards us round a hairpin bend. Irvince signals to the driver, only just visible above the steering wheel, who screeches to a halt and winds down the window. She's slightly breathless. They chat.

'Balene Fredrick,' says Irvince as she takes off again. 'Just having a breather from the softball cricket match, to check on her kids. You know, she's one of our best banana growers. We'll go back and talk to her.' He turns his van, and we set off in pursuit. She's already disappeared round the next bend. 'What a woman!' says Irvince, unable to catch her up. 'And she's only just learned to drive!'

Balene and three of her kids are waiting for us in a roadside tin shed. Every small grower has a 'field' packing shed like hers. Handsome bunches of freshly cut bananas are laid out on tiered shelves, graded by size and labelled 'Geest'. To one side is a half-packed Geest box. In front of the bench is a large plastic bowl containing a washing solution – chemicals are used here too, but much more sparingly than in Guatemala. Pinned to the back of the shed are complicated charts showing how the colour-coded production cycle must be followed. You can tell how she cares for her bananas from the way she handles them.



Dominica snapshot
Population: 74,000
Infant mortality rate: 16 per 1,000 live births
Illiteracy rate: male 5%, female 6% of people aged 15 and above
Average income (GNP) per capita: $3,040
Exports of goods and services: $125 million
Exports of bananas: $10 million; 34,903 metric tons
Sources: World Bank Country Data; FAO data. All figures are for 1997

I ask her how much she earns from her bananas each week. 'Just about enough to keep the children,' she says. 'What with their clothes and food and schooling, they cost a lot of money, you know. In a way, I wish I didn't have to grow bananas,' she continues. 'It never stops, and you have to do everything just right. It seems to get harder and harder, and we seem to earn less and less. But there's nothing for it...'

I can see that talking like this is upsetting her a bit. It's Sunday afternoon, after all, and she must be itching to get back to the cricket match, though she's too polite to say so.

'Well, they suggested I "diversify", try to grow something else as well. I reckoned they meant there wasn't going to be much of a future in bananas. So I planted two acres of ginger. But when harvest time came I couldn't sell it. That was a disaster for us. So I'll have to keep on with bananas.'

Forging ahead?

'Now, David,' says Irvince as the sun begins to set over this enchanting place, 'you mustn't go away with the impression that we Caribs are messed up. We have problems. Sure we have problems. But who hasn't? No, no. We are forging ahead. *I* am forging ahead. I mean to make some money, and that's not something we Caribs are supposed to do.'

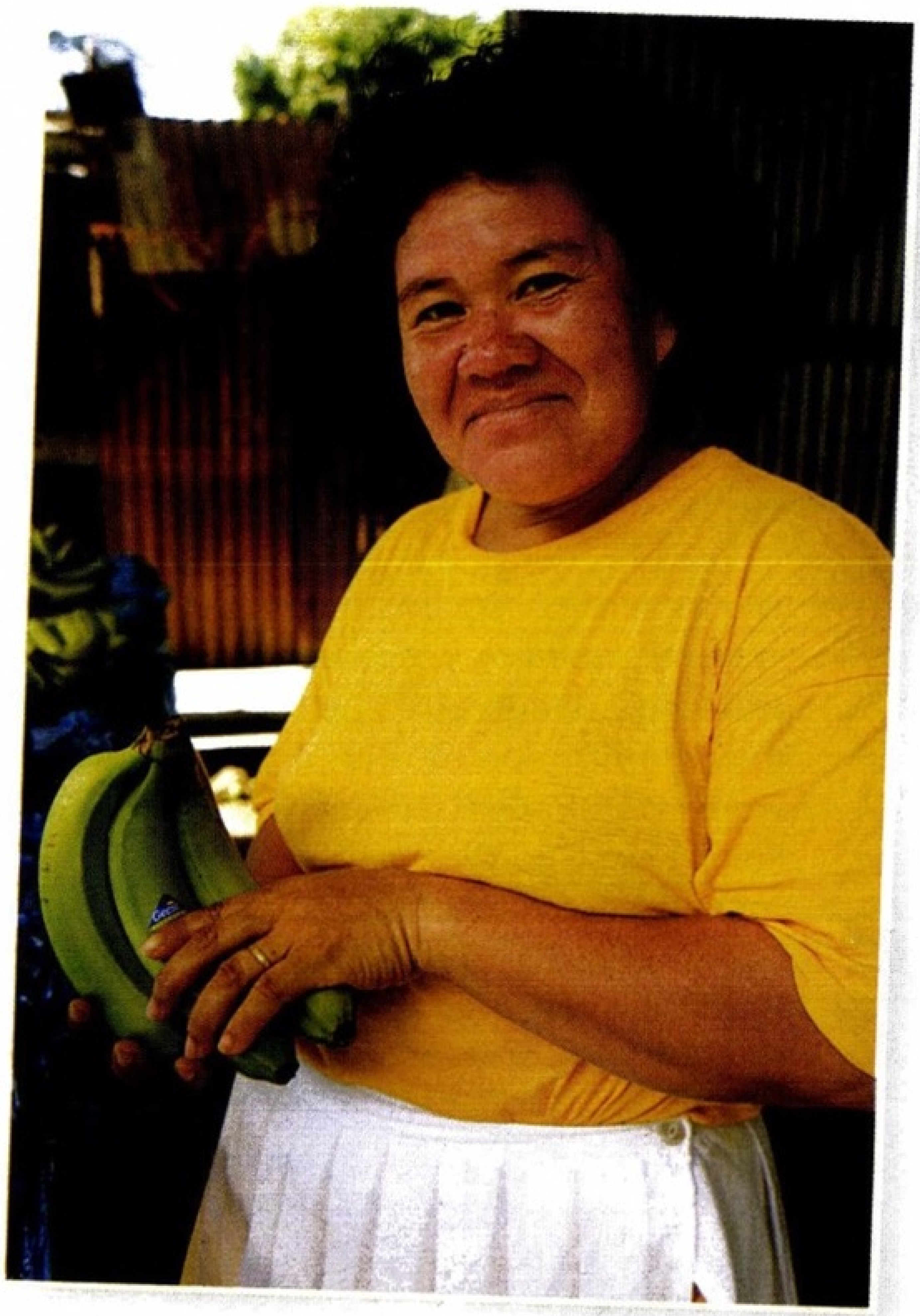
He has a stream of projects in his head: affordable cricket bats made from the stems of coconut-palm leaves; basic shelters with hammocks and kerosene lamps for wandering hikers; deluxe cottages for well-heeled tourists 'who'd like to come down to earth, but gently'. He is sceptical about official proposals for a 'model' Carib village, in which his community will be expected to perform. No, he and his associates can give the more discerning visitor a much stronger taste of passion fruit.

And that, almost everywhere, is what it seems to come down to – tourism. It is true that the island is one of the most beautiful places I have ever seen. It is also true that Dominica attracts few tourists. I fear, however, that the two are related. There's no airport for wide-bodied jets, and therefore there are no golf courses, casinos or 'resort' chain hotels. White sandy beaches and blue lagoons are few and far between. Tentative steps are being taken towards eco-tourism, to complement Dominica's chosen image as 'The Nature Island'. A 'rainforest tramway' is being constructed 'for the less-athletic eco-tourist'.

There are firm plans, too, for an international airport. This will destroy dozens of homes, a school and large areas of relatively flat agricultural land. It will plunge the people of Dominica deeply into debt, as well as the quagmire of graft and discord that engulfs all such projects. Short of selling their land to hotels and golf courses, changing into flunky clothes and training to be servile, it's hard to see how mass tourism will benefit many Dominicans – or suit their disposition.

One possibility that has been discussed, says Gregory Shillingford, is organic and fairly traded bananas. Some 15,000 acres of banana land have lain fallow for at least five years (and are therefore free of chemicals), and the growers own their own land, so the potential is there. So far, however, no-one has taken the plunge. Perhaps, just perhaps, there's another future for this extraordinary place that has yet to be disentangled from its history.

The alternative really is just too awful to contemplate.



---

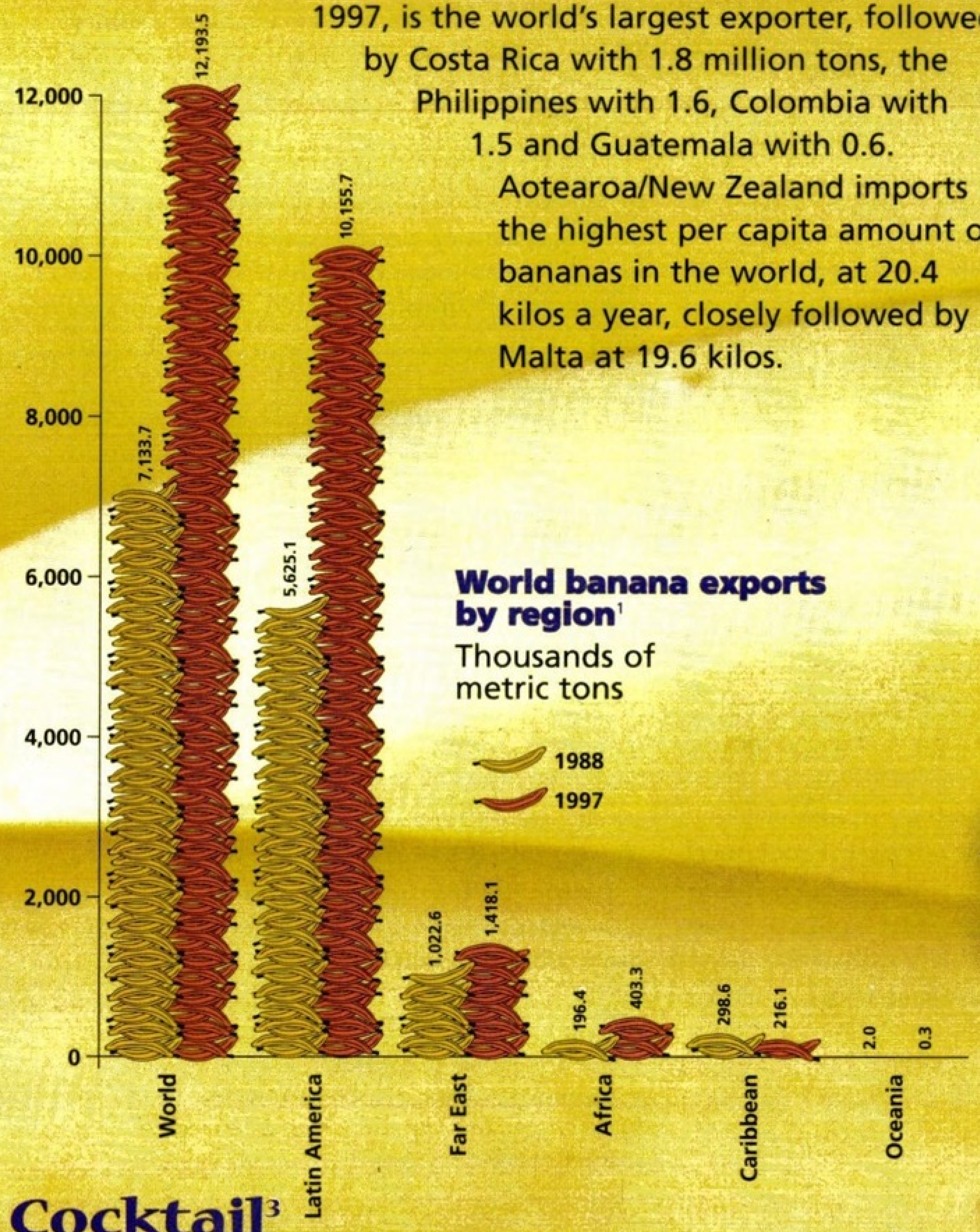
1 Lennox Honychurch, *The Dominica Story – A History of the Island*, Macmillan Education, London, 1995.

Bananas –

Trade

Where they come from

Between 1988 and 1997 the world's exports of bananas almost doubled, to just over 12 million tons. This was, however, less than a quarter of the total world production of 58.8 million tons, the remainder being consumed locally in producing countries. Ecuador, with 4.4 million tons in 1997, is the world's largest exporter, followed by Costa Rica with 1.8 million tons, the Philippines with 1.6, Colombia with 1.5 and Guatemala with 0.6. Aotearoa/New Zealand imports the highest per capita amount of bananas in the world, at 20.4 kilos a year, closely followed by Malta at 19.6 kilos.



Cocktail[3]

The chemical content

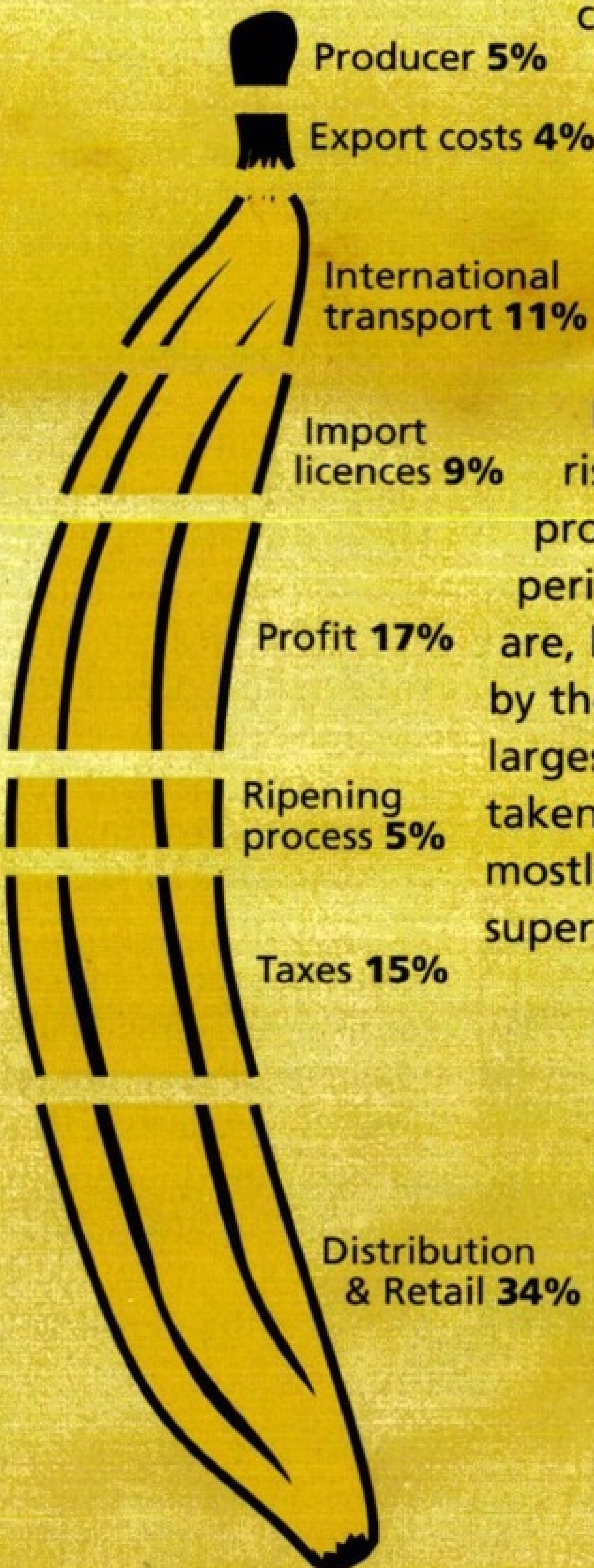
Almost all the bananas we eat are treated with chemicals throughout the production cycle. By far the heaviest users are the plantations in 'dollar' countries that have minimal monitoring or healthcare services. Plantations in Central America apply 30 kilograms of active ingredients per hectare per year – more than ten times the average for intensive agriculture in industrialized countries.

- **Fungicides:** Aerial spraying up to 40 times per year. Some, like mancozebare, are suspected carcinogens.
- **Nematicides:** Applied between two and four times a year. Designed to kill parasitic nematode worms, they are extremely dangerous. The use of DBCP resulted in the mass sterilization of tens of thousands of plantation workers from Central America and the Caribbean to the Philippines and West Africa.
- **Insecticides:** Like chlorpyrifos impregnated into plastic bags and tags placed around banana bunches.
- **Herbicides:** Are sprayed between 8 and 12 times a year. Glysophate is a suspected carcinogen.
- **Fertilizer:** Applied regularly throughout the year.
- **Disinfectants:** After harvest, the fruit is washed with tisabendazol and aluminium sulphate, which can cause severe dermatitis in direct contact with human skin.

Split

Who gets what from the price of a banana

Banana split[2]



As with almost all commodities produced in the South and consumed in the North, more than 90% of the price paid by the consumer stays in the North and never reaches the producer. Most of the risks of producing a perishable fruit are, however, born by the producer. The largest chunk of all is taken by the retailers – mostly the dominant supermarkets and chain stores.

1 Source: *Banana Statistics*, FAO, Rome, 1999. **2** Anne Claire Chambron, 'Bananas: the Green Gold of the TNCs' in *Hungry for Power*, UK Food Group, London, March 1999. **3** Andrew Wheat, 'Toxic Bananas' in *Multinational Monitor*, September 1996.

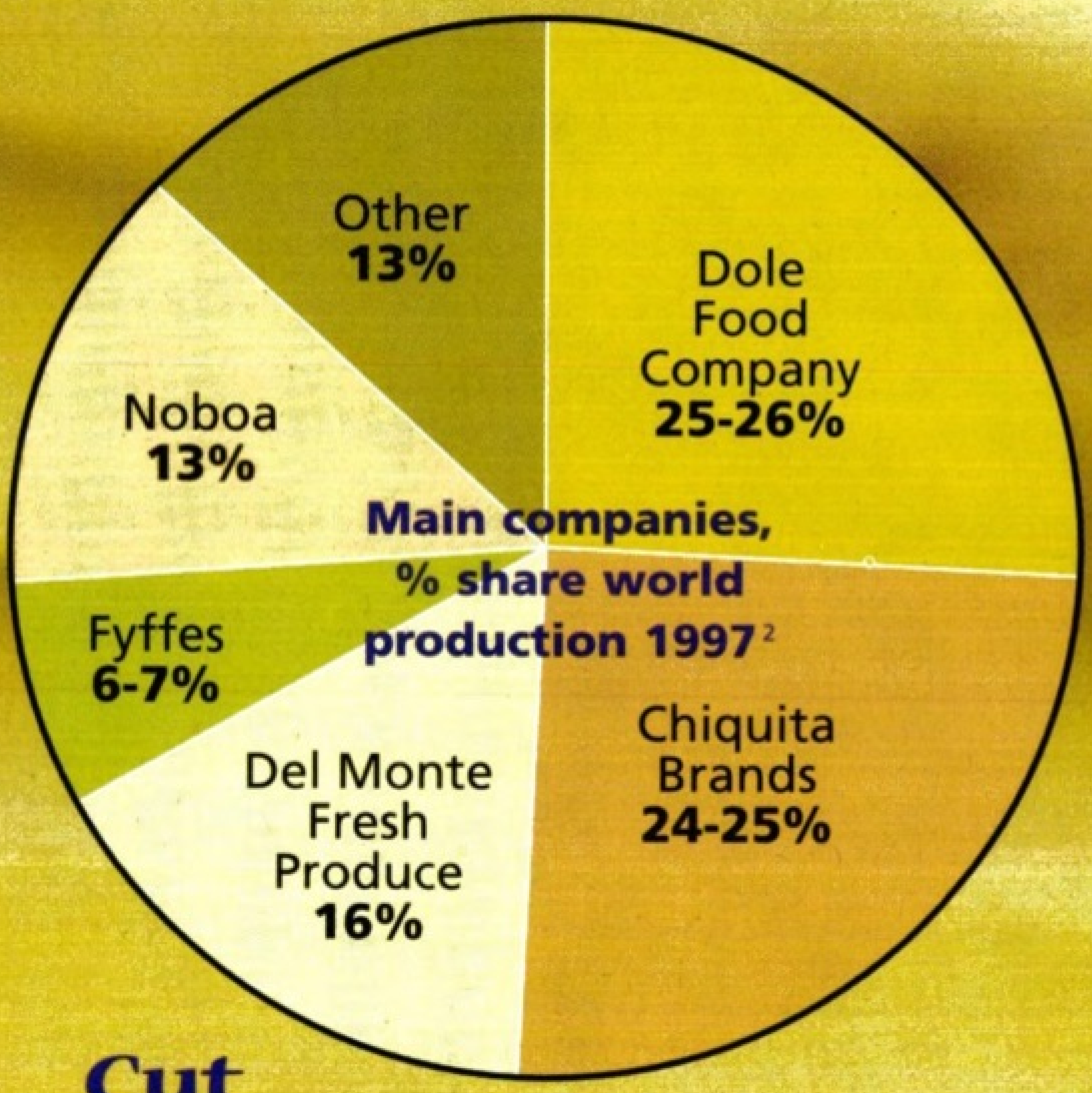
The Facts

The banana trade is big business. It comes fifth in terms of world trade in agricultural produce – after cereals, sugar, coffee and cocoa.

Destruction[1]

What bananas cost the environment

- **Waste:** For every ton of bananas produced, two tons of waste are left behind, frequently contaminated with chemicals and non-degradable plastic.
- **Deforestation:** Rising demand for bananas is met by extending the size of plantations, which often means cutting down rainforest.
- **Soil:** Copper and other residues accumulate and can leave land permanently sterile. Fragility of exposed soils, together with the concentrated water flows in irrigation systems, cause severe soil erosion and increased flooding during tropical storms.
- **Biodiversity:** Large amounts of plant, fish (including coral) and animal life are lost from the intensive use of chemical agents. Monocultures encourage diseases, some of which are becoming resistant to the chemicals designed to eradicate them.
- **Exhaustion:** Many of the plantations in Latin America are now more than 25 years old – the maximum optimal productive life for a conventional plantation. Del Monte, Dole and Chiquita are establishing new plantations in other areas of Latin America, India and Indonesia.



Cut

The companies that run the trade

The 'Big Three' banana corporations – Chiquita, Dole and Del Monte – control two-thirds of world banana exports. Chiquita's once-dominant position has been challenged by the Dole Food Company. Del Monte is now owned by a Chile-based, Miami-controlled conglomerate, backed by money from the United Arab Emirates. Among the other major players, Fyffes was once owned by United Fruit and is now based in Ireland. Noboa is the biggest national company of Ecuador, owned by the richest man in Latin America.

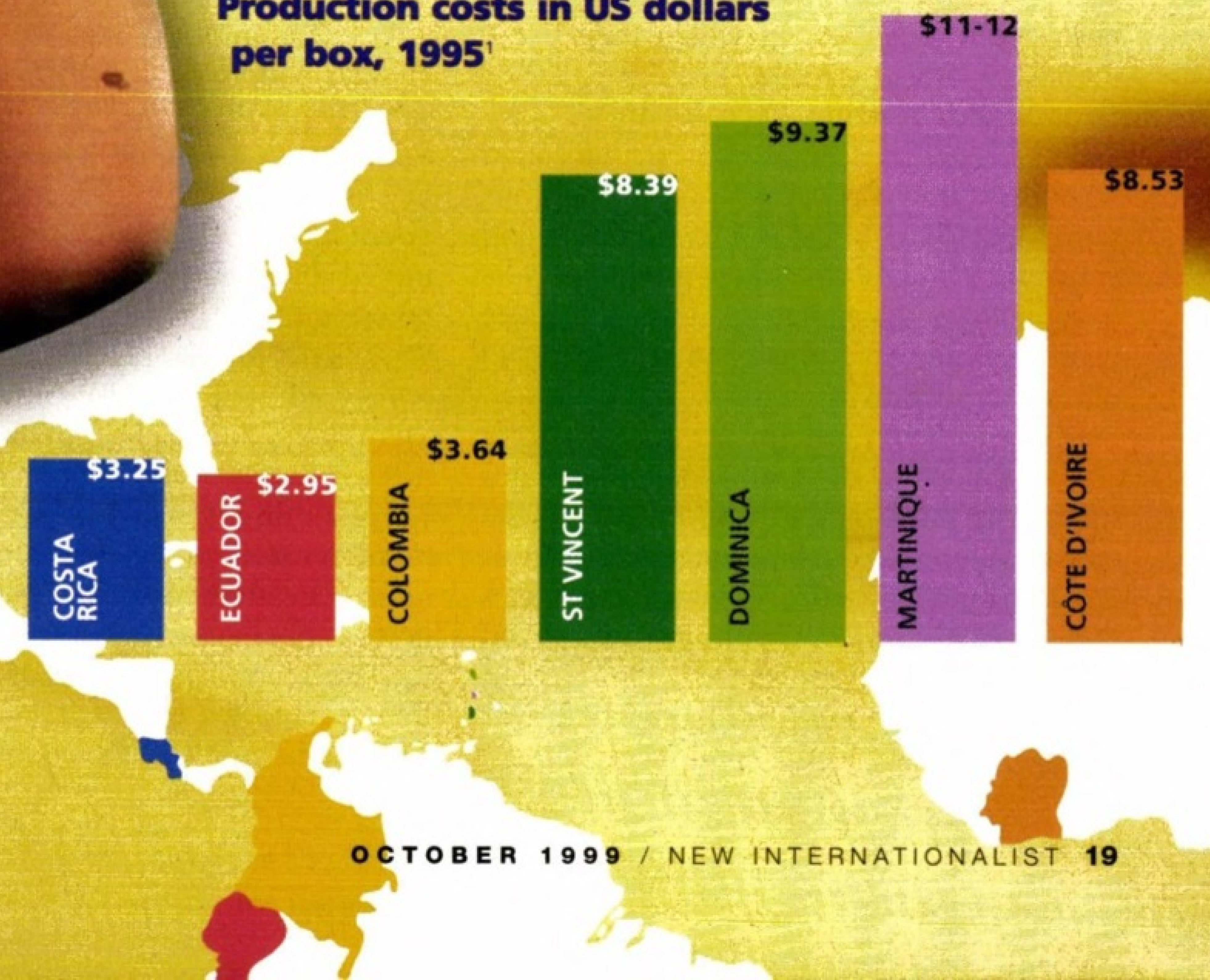
CHRIS MARTIN / STILL PICTURES

Price

Who pays for cheap bananas

The 'dollar' fruit from the plantations of Central and South America are cheaper than anywhere else – largely because the costs are 'externalized', which means they are paid by someone else; in this case by plantation workers and the environment. If these costs were 'internalized', decent wages paid and environmental damage eliminated, the difference would disappear.

Production costs in US dollars per box, 1995[1]



Fruit of the fu

In the Dominican Republic a remarkable experiment is being turned into a real alternative – for both producers and consumers.

THE story really began in 1992, with a small environmental disaster. In the mountains that march westwards across the troubled border of the Dominican Republic with Haiti, there were 250 families living in a state of virtual destitution. They began to burn down the forest in which they lived, to make charcoal for sale.

'We didn't really want to do it,' says Angel Custodio, a shrewd, articulate man who's in the early years of a vigorous retirement. 'The forest is a living thing, and we were killing it. We knew it couldn't last long. Our environment is alive, and we want to protect it. But we had no choice, no other way of making a living. So we asked the Government for help.'

I suppose you could say they got lucky: the Government responded. On the coastal plain just outside the small town of Azua it built an entire village for Angel's community, complete with utilities, paved roads, health centre, school, church and halfway decent homes. It also handed over a plot of fallow, fertile land large enough for every family to have its own 'parcel' of at least two hectares – sufficient to live from. So the erstwhile charcoal burners set to work growing maize, cassava, ground provisions – and a few bananas. They used no chemicals because, Angel Custodio freely admits, they simply didn't have the money.

The people of Finca 6, as it was prosaically called, would doubtless have remained in much the same situation today, had it not been for two further strokes of good fortune. Well, in truth the first is a mixed blessing. I have never been anywhere quite so hot. Even inside the cab of an air-conditioned pickup, the thermometer registered well over 40º centigrade, though this is apparently exceptional. The heat is, however, relatively dry. That is bad news for plant diseases that need a good dose of humidity to flourish. But, with a high water table beneath them and irrigation, it is good news for bananas.

The second piece of good fortune was that, around the towns of Monte Cristi and Mao in the north of the country, two Dutch agencies were helping to develop better and fairer ways of producing bananas. Solidaridad and Max Havelaar – I have come across them before, as pioneers in the fair-trade coffee business (**NI 271**) – were making some headway across notoriously stony ground.

So too was a young Dutch woman called Jetta van den Berg. In 1994 she set up an export company in Azua called Savid SA – an elision of *salud* ('health') and *vida* ('life'). Savid took on the tricky business of exporting an unconventional product: organic bananas. The company now exports to Europe, the US and Japan. This has helped to make the Dominican Republic the world's largest producer of organic bananas, with over 80 per cent of the total. Though accounting for just 27,000 tons of exports in 1998, the world market has been expanding fast, at an average 30 per cent per year, and demand consistently exceeds supply.

So Savid had to go looking for new producers and approached Finca 6. 'The market for organic bananas looked as if it was better than for our other produce,' says Angel, 'and so we began to develop our production for Savid. And now we do believe, one-hundred per cent, that organic production is better than conventional methods. I assure you, we're not just thinking about our own lives, our own health, but the lives of consumers as well, and

about how to develop our country. And why not others?'

A severe test came in September last year, when Hurricane George swept across the Dominican Republic and destroyed much of the country's banana crop, including that of Finca 6. In marked contrast to the way the Big Three exploited Mitch in Guatemala, Savid continued to finance the growers through to recovery, and they are now returning to full production, their confidence shaken but intact.

Organic commitment

Porfirio Acosta Gil, who is showing me around, has a mobile phone that never stops ringing. 'One request after another!' he sighs. 'I should turn the damn thing off.' But he can't quite bring himself to do it. He's the Production Manager for Savid, the head of a team of agronomists and evidently a revered figure. We are waved down by a young man on a moped. He hasn't been paid, he says. Porfirio patiently explains that he'll have to get his money from the person who owes it to him. We trundle along behind a man on another moped who has a machete slung across his back. Porfirio looks at his watch. 'That man's off to work, you know. He doesn't have to go, because it's lunch time. He's doing it voluntarily. It's incredible, the commitment of people here.'

After Guatemala and even Dominica I can't quite believe what I'm seeing here – all around us are banana plants that seem to flourish without the aid of chemicals of any kind. Porfirio assures me that they're real enough. Organic certification is by the German agency BCS, and tests are rigorous.

The erstwhile charcoal burners set to work growing maize, yucca, ground provisions – and a few bananas. They used no chemicals because they simply didn't have the money

In truth, there's nothing very mysterious about it, he explains. The prime requirement is for meticulous tending of the plants, cutting away dying leaves, keeping the topsoil clean, removing the flowers from the bunches at the right time, covering them with reusable, chemical-free plastic bags to encourage growth and prevent damage from birds and surrounding leaves.

The same 'one-follower' system is used here as elsewhere: successive shoots are named 'mother', 'daughter', 'granddaughter' and others are prevented from growing. Because of the aridity, the lower stem of the 'mother' is preserved after cutting, to allow its large water content to drain into the follower. There are irrigation channels that use groundwater pumped from wells. Spraying is with citrus oil which controls most, if not all, of the banana diseases. Organic fertilizer is still imported from Costa Rica, though production is now being developed here. We visit the fertilizer factory, where large piles of animal droppings and compost attract the most gigantic mosquitoes, and I am bitten at last. Who knows? I might come across the big hairy spiders from the fables of my childhood, lurking in a bunch of bananas and hitching a ride from the Caribbean, before the chemical holocaust.

Porfirio has the air of someone who is making good use of his talents. I imagine that his skills would command very much better financial rewards from ordinary commercial companies.

'Possibly,' he says. 'I don't really know. And I'm not that interested. You know, for all the bother of this job, I get tremendous satisfaction from it. It satisfies me, it really does, to be involved in something that people are committed to, with people who are overcoming their poverty, who are building something good. At this moment, I wouldn't want to do anything else.'

He is at pains to point out that not all Savid's organic farmers are small growers who own their own land, like Finca 6. Down the road is Seferino Corporán, who owns 32 hectares and employs upwards of 20 labourers. When we arrive, they are constructing a new packing plant for him without, I have to say, much evident enthusiasm – the sun is high in the midday sky. This is a salutary reminder. Around

The Custodio clan (right) and Angel (inset top): Porfirio takes another call (inset bottom); taking a break from the packing at Finca 6 (main photo).

Heriberto tending the mighty herb on his 'parcel'; pointing out leaf spot (inset).

Azua there are also small shacks where landless rural labourers still live in absolute poverty. I have seen them everywhere, strung along the road from the capital, Santo Domingo, which passes through sugarcane fields resembling the banana plantations of Guatemala.

Finca 6 is different. At first, they weren't sure quite how to sort themselves out. Jetta van den Berg and Savid were insistent that they should make up their minds: dealing with each one of them individually would be impossible. 'We thought about forming a co-operative,' says Angel Custodio. 'But, well, our experience of rural co-operatives hasn't always been very positive. Too much cheating, I'm afraid. So we decided to set up an Association. Each of us still owns our "parcel", but we all belong to the Association, which meets regularly, elects officers to deal with Savid and things that affect us all. For example, if one *parcelero* doesn't tend the plants properly there's a risk of disease spreading to all of us.'

So pervasive is the influence of Savid that I wonder whether it doesn't sometimes feel like their employer. Angel doesn't think so. 'Would that there were more companies like Savid!' he says. 'But our interests have to come above those of the company. Because the company can withdraw from us whenever it wants to. So I think we have to remain organized. We shouldn't think as if the Association won't last long, for just ten years, say. We want it to last much longer than that, and to develop.'

Building on success

Angel takes some satisfaction from the fact that neighbouring growers now want to join Finca 6. That, he believes, is a good measure of its success. The best advice he can give them is to form their own association, and Finca 6 will help them as much as they can. 'We want people, especially poor people, to be united. Well, if you have money, very *very* large quantities of money, then you can live as you want. But if, like us, you don't, then sometimes you're going to need a service from somebody that *isn't* money, a service given individually, in person. By being organized we can achieve this.'

And so, in 1997, Finca 6 was certified as a fair-trade producer by Max Havelaar in the Netherlands, still the largest market for fair-trade bananas. As we talk, Angel and I are sitting beneath the roof of a new *comedor* (diner) for the growers – one product of the fair-trade premium they get paid. There are plans to build much-needed warehousing facilities as well.

So Finca 6 has achieved something very, *very* rare: an organic *and* fairly traded product. I try thinking of this extraordinary achievement as the result of mere good fortune. But is it just a matter of luck that a government should justify its existence from time to time, and assist the people it claims to represent? Is it coincidence that, in the face of such an obsolete trade, people everywhere should defy bleak orthodoxy and search for something better? Is it mere chance that has given them the skill, inventiveness, determination and commitment to make it happen? Of course not. It is possible.

Still, I have to have my doubts about Finca 6, if only because I know what they're up against, and there is still such a long way to go. For a start, the members of Finca 6 have turned over their plots almost entirely to the production of bananas, creating dependency on a single export crop. Quite apart from hurricanes, the risks they face are daunting. Organic methods are not completely effective against Black Sigatoga – the worst banana disease – or fungus. Sooner or later, the market for organic bananas will prove as treacherous as any other. The packing and refrigerated transport operation is contracted out, so at the heart of the plantation you find low-paid labourers at work. Savid SA itself has just one shareholder: Jetta van den Berg. A great deal seems to depend on her.

I walk with Porfirio through the *parcel* of Heriberto Custodio, another member of the Custodio clan who is currently President of the Finca 6 Association. My doubts begin to recede into perspective. Just as I had been told they would, other *parceleros* arrive to give Heriberto a hand. Today they are going to clean up his *parcel* – tomorrow it will be the turn of someone else. They work with their machetes in an easy rhythm, cutting back surplus shoots, cleaning the irrigation channels, lopping off unhealthy leaves, chatting and joking among themselves. They do not have the driven, mechanical movements of rural labourers, though the work is no less strenuous in the tremendous heat. Porfirio looks around with sharp eyes, pointing from time to time to a leaf here that needs pruning, a flower there that needs plucking, the first evidence of leaf spot; coaxing, teaching, encouraging.

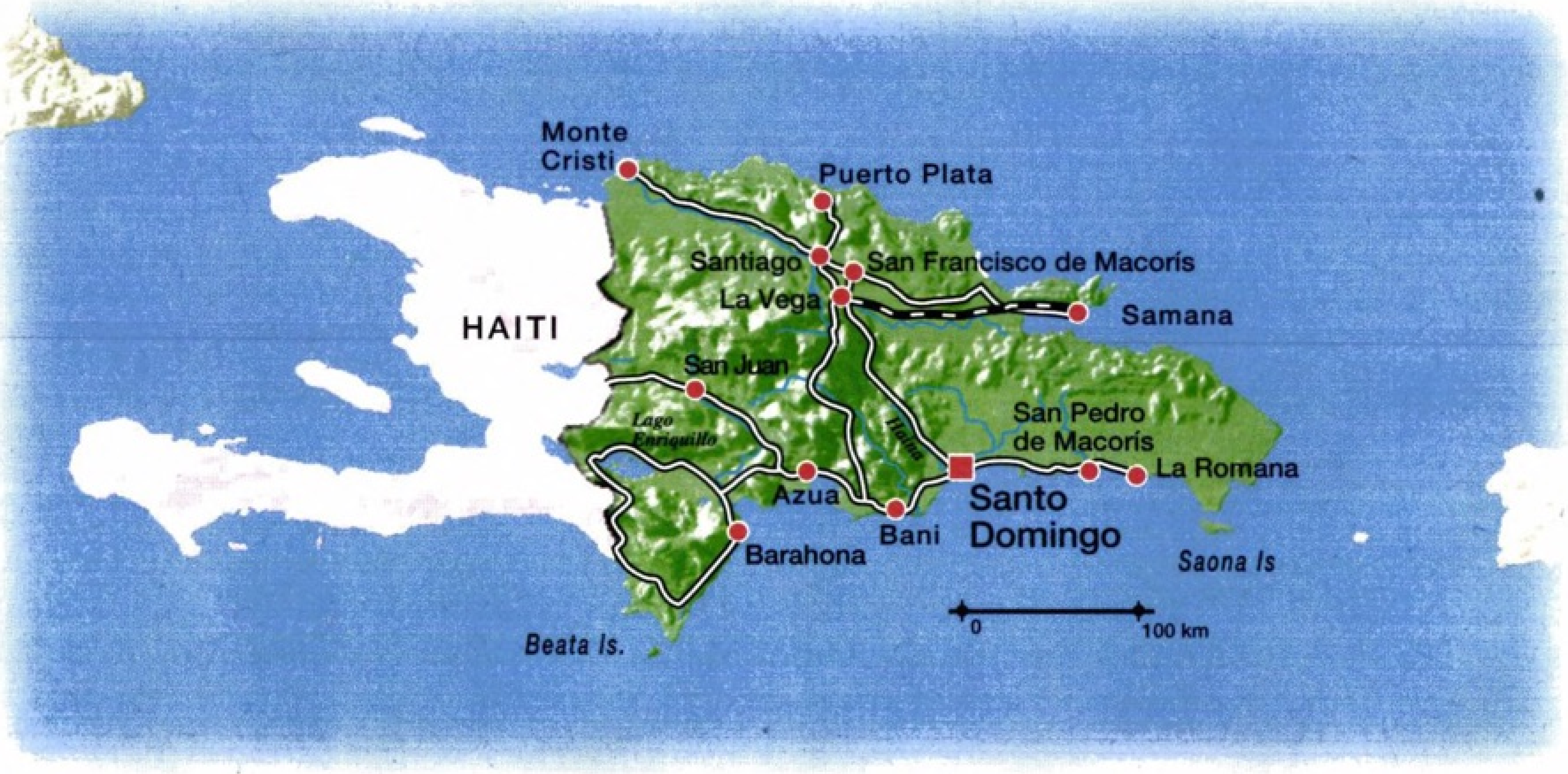
'These plants are so productive,' he says. 'You know, they are just as productive as on the big plantations. All it takes is knowledge, care and skill. And a lot of hard work, of course.'

I ask him how much a *parcelero* can earn. 'I don't really know, and I don't ask. But I've been told it's about $1,000 a month, and can be as much as $2,000.'

We are invited to Heriberto's house. There are flowers and trimmed hedges leading up to a white front door. Inside, two handsome teenage girls, Heriberto's daughters, are sitting in comfortable armchairs watching TV. There's a son, too, studying electrical engineering at university in Santo Domingo, and a small niece fussing around about something. Behind the chairs is a dining room and, though we have arrived unannounced, a meal of fresh vegetables, rice and chicken is being laid out. There is iced tap water laced with fresh limes.

Heriberto gently complains about the unpaid work he has to put in at the Association, the constant disputes he must resolve, the burden of responsibility he has to carry.

'But you know,' I say to him, 'I don't think the plantation workers in Guatemala would credit this. I mean, I don't think *I* can quite credit this – that there's a halfway decent living to be had from growing bananas. You must be proud of what you have achieved.'



Dominican Republic snapshot

Population: 8 million
Infant mortality rate: 40 per 1,000 live births
Illiteracy rate: male 17% and female 18% of people aged 15 and above
Average income (GNP per capita): $1,750
Exports of goods and services: $7,221 million
Exports of bananas: $10 million – 62,000 metric tons

Sources: World Bank Country Data; FAO data. All figures are for 1997

'Oh yes we are,' intervenes Heriberto's wife. 'You should have seen how we lived in the mountains, what this place was like when we first arrived. There's no comparison. No comparison! Now we can live with dignity. Here there is a future for our children.'

And then she brings in the bananas.

'You *eat* bananas!' I say

'Of course!' she says. 'They are very good for you, you know. Very nourishing. Very tasty. Don't you think it would be a little strange if we didn't eat them?'

'Very strange indeed,' I say.

I peel back the skin, place the naked fruit on my plate, cut a delicate slice, spear it with a fork and slip it into my mouth.

'Well, what do you think?' she asks.

'Perfect,' I say. 'Absolutely perfect.' ■

The perfect banana enters a refrigerated container at Finca 6.

Fair-trade and organic bananas

The criteria for organic products are now firmly established and scientifically verifiable. But as yet bananas represent only a tiny part of a fast-growing organic market that in 1997 was estimated to be worth $10 billion worldwide. The European Union is the world's largest market, and Germany the largest consumer of organic bananas, with sales of over 6,000 tons in 1998. Britain is next, at about half that level. Prospects are thought to be extremely good, the main constraint being supply problems. The price premium at retail level varies from 50 to 200 per cent.

Organic bananas are not necessarily fair-trade, however. For fair-trade bananas the situation is more complex. The criteria include direct links between consumers and producers, a guaranteed minimum price and price premium for producers, favourable financing and long-term commitments. The main suppliers are farmers' co-operatives in Ecuador, the Dominican Republic and Costa Rica, as well as a plantation in Ghana. The price premium at retail level averages 20 per cent.

Total imports of fair-trade bananas into Western Europe rose from 12,500 tons in 1997 to 17,366 tons in 1998. The leading importer is Agrofair, a joint venture formed by the Dutch NGO Solidaridad and producers in developing countries. Agrofair pioneered the Dutch market and accounts for more than 60 per cent of imports into Europe. Their launch in the Netherlands in 1996 brought a market share of ten per cent within a few months and still averages five per cent – the highest share for a fair-trade product.

AlterTrade Japan has been importing fair-trade bananas from Negros in the Philippines since 1989. The Transfair Foundation plans to launch in the US this year, while in Canada the Sustainable Development Institute and Oxfam Canada are looking to introduce the product into British Colombia under the Fair Fruit Initiative.

In 1997 the Fair Trade Labelling Organization International (FLO), an NGO which holds the register of certified producers across a growing range of products, was established in Bonn. Surveys suggest that 7.5 per cent of European consumers would buy fair-trade bananas at a price premium of ten per cent, which translates into 300,000 tons a year. The need to buy import licenses as 'newcomers' under the European banana regime is the biggest constraint – in 1999 the allocation was limited to 276 tons per 'newcomer'. Large premiums therefore have to be paid to buy licences from other holders, inflating the retail price to consumers and reducing payments to producers.

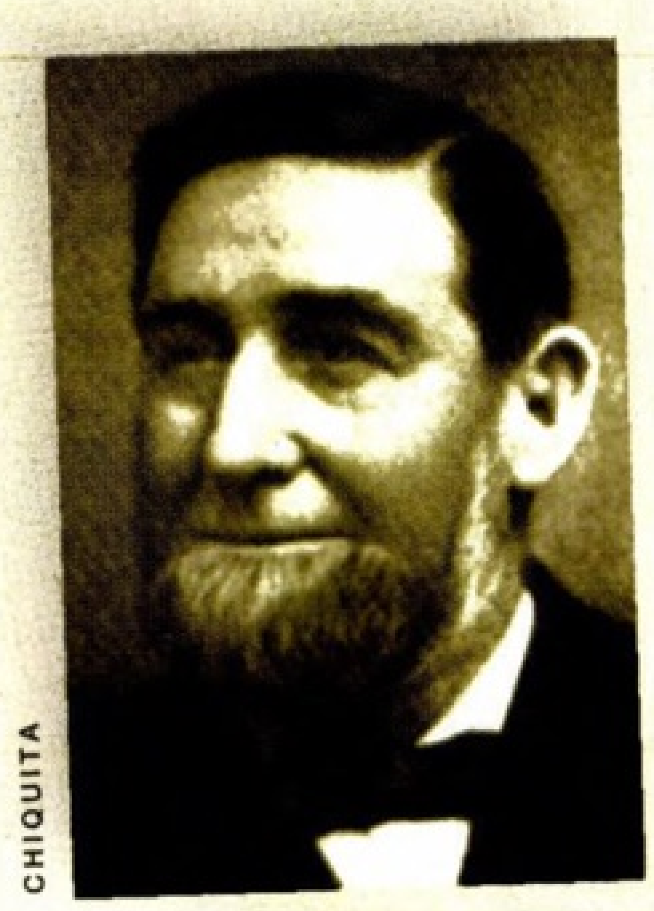
Source: *The Market for 'Organic' and 'Fair-trade' Bananas*, FAO Committee on Commodity Problems, Intergovernmental Group on Bananas and Tropical Fruits, Gold Coast, Australia, May 1999.

The Battle of the Ba

Corporate coups and the rise and fall of political regimes – all par for the course in the ongoing war to control the banana trade.

Nº1462.
YES!
Lawrence Wright

MARY EVANS



CHIQUITA

Business in bunches

In 1870 Captain Lorenzo Dow Baker (pictured left) landed the schooner *Telegraph* (pictured below) in Jamaica and saw that bananas were popular on local markets. He purchased 160 bunches for one shilling per stalk on Port Antonio docks; 11 days later he sold bunches for two dollars each in Jersey City, making a huge profit. The legendary bounty of the banana trade was established. Bananas were shipped to Boston and New Orleans from Cuba and the Dominican Republic as well as Jamaica. By 1898 some 16 million bunches were being imported into the US.

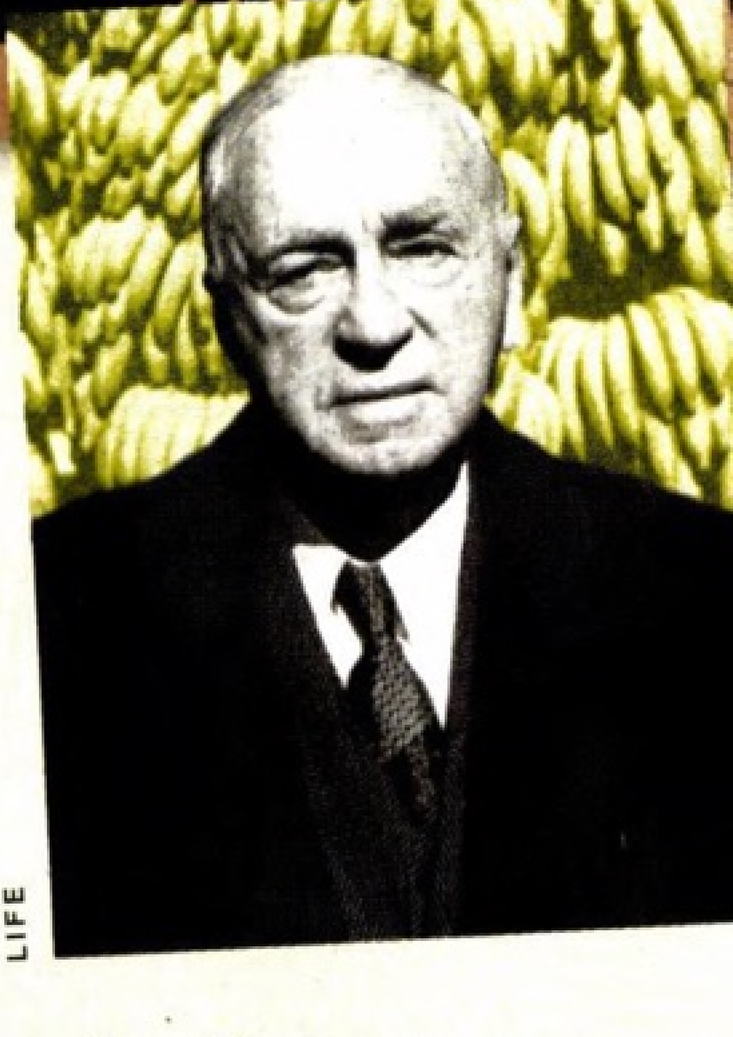
Uncrowned king

In 1899 the United Fruit Company (UFCO) was formed in Boston and began to develop its own plantations in Central America. In Costa Rica, Minor Keith did a deal with the Government to build – with great loss of life – a railway to the Atlantic coast and planted bananas beside the track. He married the daughter of the President and became known as the 'Uncrowned King of Central America'. UFCO's 'Great White Fleet' totalled 95 ships by 1930. Panama disease or wilting first destroyed banana farms in 1900, and continued to create major problems for UFCO's banana plantations thereafter.

CHIQUITA

Sam the Man

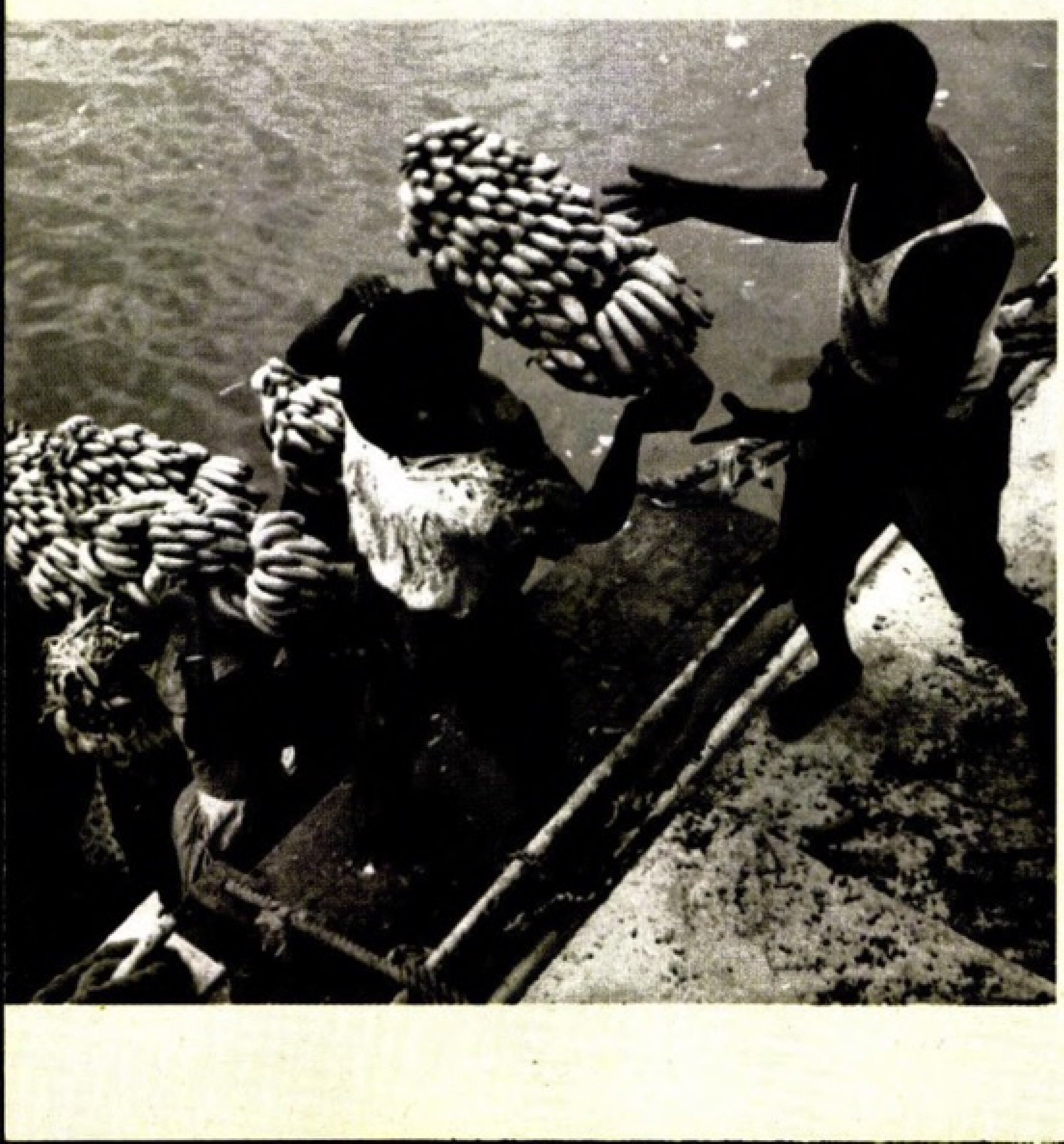
Samuel Zemurray – 'Sam the Banana Man' (pictured right) – went to Honduras in 1905, where he financed a coup that brought very favourable concessions for his developing banana business. He pioneered new plantation techniques, and in 1915 began production from large new landholdings in the Motagua Valley, on the disputed Honduras/Guatemala border. In 1930 United Fruit bought out Zemurray's holdings for $31.5 million; in 1933, as the largest shareholder, he became UFCO's Managing Director. By then the company owned plantations the size of Switzerland in Central America and the Caribbean.



LIFE

Imperial unease

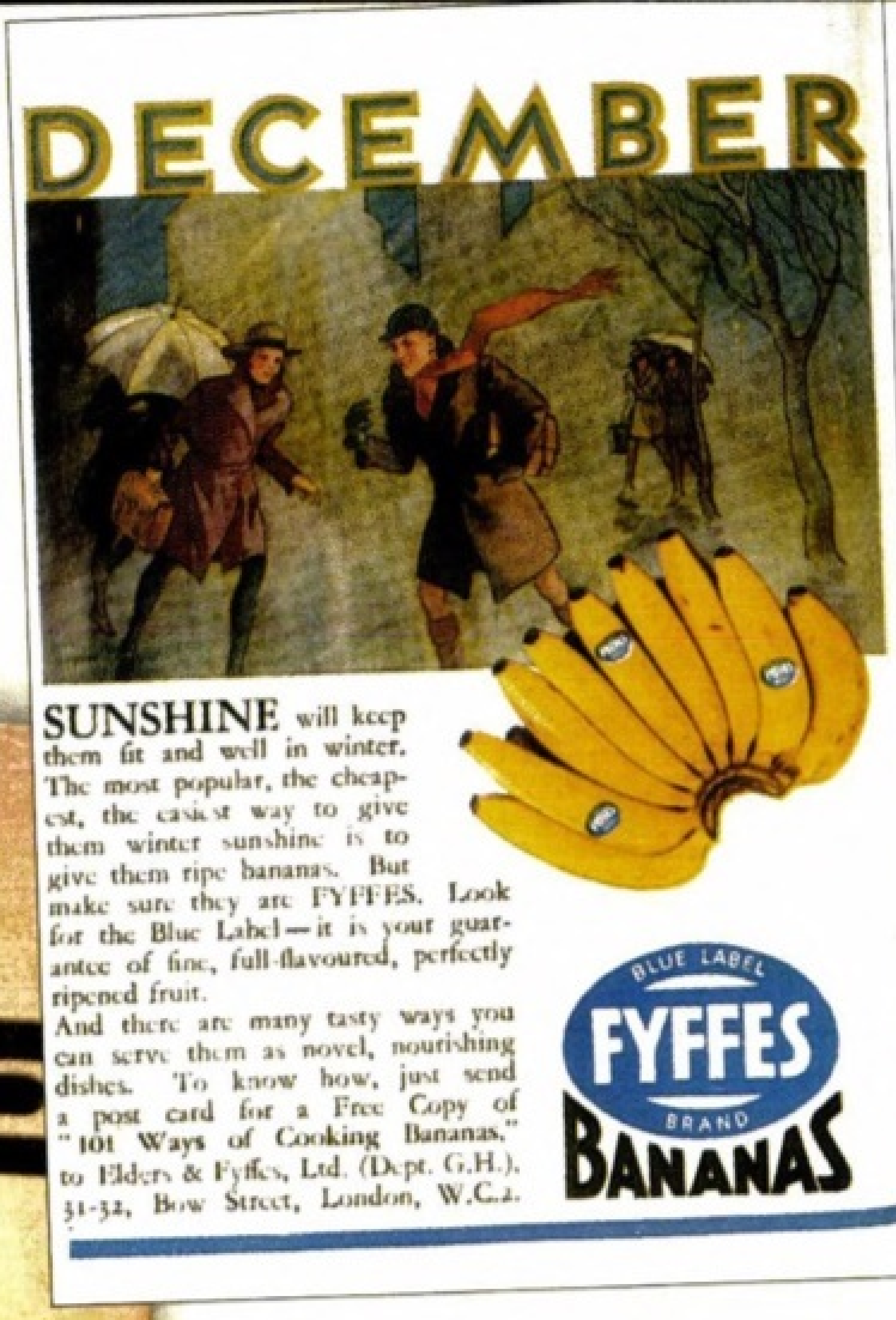
The British Government became worried about US influence in its Caribbean colonies. In 1901 it provided a large subsidy for the Elder Dempster shipping company to begin a refrigerated service to Jamaica (pictured left). In 1913 the Fyffes company was created for the banana trade, but it ran into financial difficulties and was taken over – by United Fruit. The Imperial Economic Committee in London reported in 1926 that an 'organization under American control monopolizes the whole supply of bananas from Central America and Jamaica to the United Kingdom'. A strategy of providing financial assistance to associations of banana growers, who would supply the British market independently of UFCO, was implemented. By 1938 Jamaica produced 78 per cent of British imports.



HULTON DEUTSCHE

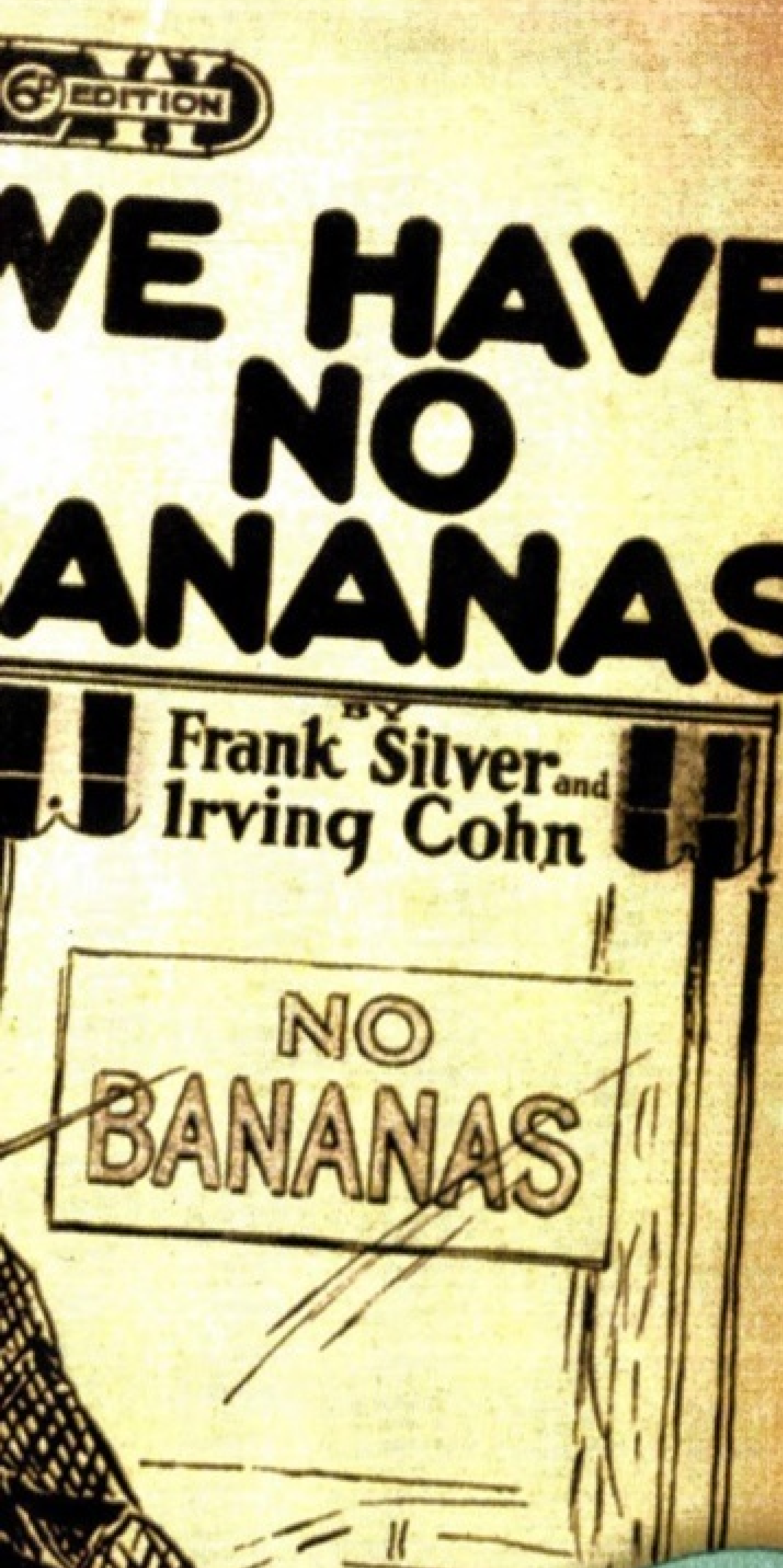
Sources: Stephen Schlesinger and Stephen Kinzer, *Bitter Fruit*, Sinclair Browne, London, 1982; Lawrence S Grossman, *The Political Ecology of Bananas*, University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill and London, 1998; *Green Gold*, Latin America Bureau, London, 1987.

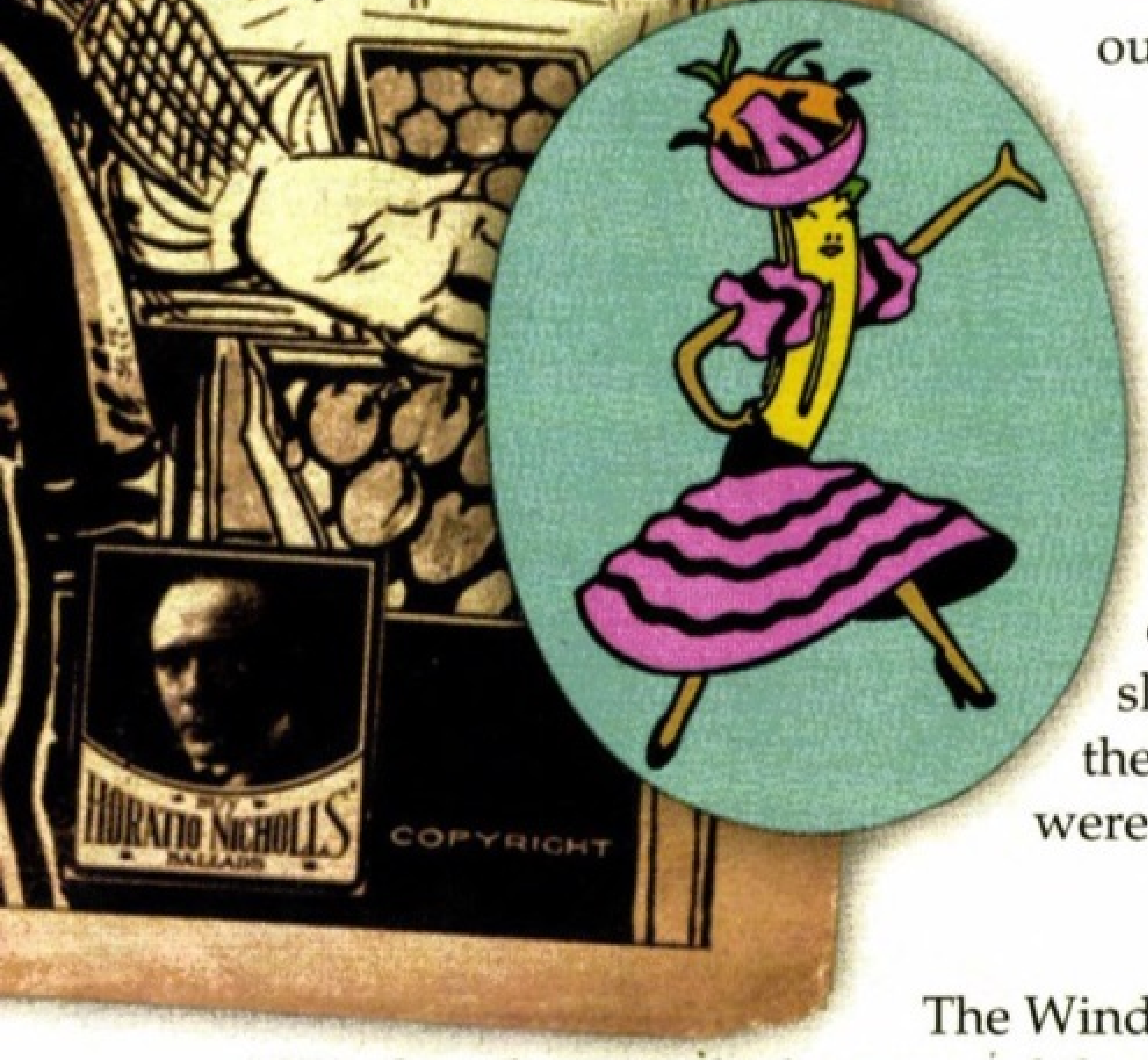
nana



SUNSHINE will keep them fit and well in winter. The most popular, the cheapest, the easiest way to give them winter sunshine is to give them ripe bananas. But make sure they are FYFFES. Look for the Blue Label—it is your guarantee of fine, full-flavoured, perfectly ripened fruit. And there are many tasty ways you can serve them as novel, nourishing dishes. To know how, just send a post card for a Free Copy of "101 Ways of Cooking Bananas," to Elders & Fyffes, Ltd. (Dept. G.H.), 31-32, Bow Street, London, W.C.2.

MARY EVANS





War of the Worlds

The Second World War brought the banana trade to a halt – boats were requisitioned for the war effort and shipping was disrupted, causing great hardship in the region. In 1945 bananas returned again to Britain, shipped from Jamaica under the control of the Ministry of Food. The Moyne Commission published its pre-war findings on the dreadful conditions in Britain's West Indian colonies. It recommended financial support for small-scale banana production, particularly in the Windward Islands. On 6 December 1950 a ship arrived at Liverpool from Sierra Leone with a cargo of bananas of which 78,000 were too ripe; 3,000 dock workers were asked to eat all they could and got through 37,000. The British taste for bananas had survived the war.

HULTON DEUTSCHE

Carve-up

In 1952 the British Government 're-privatized' the banana industry. Imports paid for in US dollars – which, in bankrupt Britain, were extremely scarce – required a licence. In 1954 Geest, a company owned by Dutch brothers based in Britain, signed a ten-year contract with all the growers' associations operating in the Windward Islands. In 1958 the Windward Islands Banana Growers' Association (WINBAN) based in St Lucia was formed. By 1959 banana imports to Britain had for the first time surpassed the pre-war high. Between 1964 and 1966 a mini Banana War broke out between Geest and Fyffes, who eventually agreed to split the British market between them. In 1969 Fyffes unilaterally broke its contract with Jamaica, importing low-cost fruit from Côte d'Ivoire and Surinam instead.

Miss Chiquita

UFCO launched a 'Miss Chiquita' (pictured left) advertising campaign in the US in 1944. Technical changes were also made to the production process. In 1961 bananas were pre-cut and placed in boxes instead of bunches, to protect against bruising. Following a period of unrest on its plantations, in 1954 the company orchestrated a coup against the Government of Guatemala. After an anti-trust suit in 1958, UFCO was slowly broken up into the 'Big Three' banana companies. Between them, they increased their domination of the European market, by now the world's largest importer. All three were subsequently absorbed into a succession of multinational conglomerates.

Bust and boom

The Windward Islands faced two major setbacks in 1973; the oil crisis which increased the cost of shipping and chemical inputs, and the accession of Britain to the European Economic Community. Here it joined France, whose 'Overseas Departments' in Martinique and Guadeloupe were guaranteed two-thirds of the French banana market. Britain negotiated a 20-per-cent tariff on 'dollar' bananas. Then, in 1975, the first Lomé Convention guaranteed 42 former colonies in Africa, the Caribbean and Pacific ('ACP') trading terms on a par with the best of the preceding years. From the late 1970s to the early 1990s a 'banana boom' swept the Windward Islands.

QUEEN
A
Banana
25¢

CORBIS

Rules of engagement

In 1992 the Single European Market and European Union (EU) were designed to remove internal trade barriers. A single new banana 'regime' imposed tariffs and quotas for each exporting country, overall quotas for 'dollar' bananas and 'traditional' or ACP countries, plus additional tradable licenses. Chiquita decided to oppose the new EU regime altogether at the World Trade Organization (WTO) after it was established in 1995. On three separate occasions the WTO has found against the EU regime. In early 1999 Chiquita persuaded the US Government to impose punitive import tariffs on EU imports. The latest skirmish in the Banana War continues, with another adjudication from the WTO expected in November. During the 1990s, however, an increasingly effective international network of trade unions, campaigns, organic and fair-trade producers has joined the fray to change the rules of engagement.

One short of a bunch

David Ransom argues that the banana multinationals are in big trouble – and greenwashing is no substitute for an alternative that already exists.

If you travel as I did from plantation workers in Guatemala to small farmers in Dominica and fair-trade organic growers in the Dominican Republic, it is blindingly obvious – you're moving away from a landscape that is best left behind, towards a more desirable and sustainable future. You are also rediscovering how millions of people grow most of the world's bananas without getting into the kind of mess that plagues the international business.

What is it that attracts world trade so unfailingly to the worst option? Why on earth should the self-styled 'modernizers' of Chiquita, Dole and Del Monte be so anxious to retreat into the distant past? The fact that they appear to have no choice seems to me to be a symptom of terminal decline in an obsolete industry.

This may sound like mere wishful thinking. After all, the fact of the matter is that the Big Three are extremely efficient producers of cheap bananas which they export into a rapidly expanding and lucrative market. And conventional wisdom at least suggests that Northern consumers are always going to prefer their tropical fruit cheap, unblemished, uniform and big – for that you can't do better than the Big Three. Immensely wealthy and powerful, the Big Three look set to win the Banana War at the World Trade Organization (WTO), which lays down the law of international trade, and wipe out the alternatives. One way or another, the future surely belongs to them.

Curious, then, that the hard-nosed brokers of high finance are not quite so sure. Chiquita Brands International has been making big loses of late and its stock price has been getting very depressed. Sure, Chiquita made some silly mistakes. The company anticipated lush new markets in Eastern Europe which failed to materialize. That, so they say, is why Chiquita has been the most aggressive of the banana warriors – it's attempting to recover its position.

But the problems of all the Big Three run much deeper than this. The giant old multinational corporations which once practised 'vertical integration', from production and shipping to processing and distribution, have fallen out of financial fashion. You can't physically shift a plantation on the Internet, so freewheeling finance capital doesn't like to get too mixed up in the sticky, risky business of actually producing things like bananas. Its only interest is in stock prices.

Falling apart

What's more, the best returns in the food business are made at the other end of the production chain – from retailing, where giant superstores now rule the roost. Slowly but surely, power and profits have shifted away from the monopoly selling power of the old corporations, like the Big Three, towards the monopoly buying power of the new retail giants, whose vice-like grip on what food we buy is another dismal tale. These retailers must have what they want: low prices, consistency of supply and high-quality produce. Though this is precisely what the Big Three claim to provide, in practice they're being driven

PAUL SMITH / PANOS

NIGEL DICKINSON / STILL PICTURES

The wreckage left by Hurricane Mitch – and the Big Three – in Honduras (above); washing bananas in Ecuador (below).

to distraction on all three counts.

Keeping prices down and 'competitive' means, among other things, cutting the cost of labour. Since, as we have seen, conditions on many banana plantations already amount to slavery, further savings here are hard to find. If anything, an opposite and upward pressure is likely to mount, as persecution of the labour movement gets harder to sustain in the face of popular resistance. For sure, in countries like Guatemala and Honduras labour conditions in general are rarely better and often worse than on the plantations – otherwise no-one would work on them. Which is why the banana companies have used their influence for the past 100 years to keep *everyone* in their 'banana republics' as poor as possible, by staging coups, supporting the most reactionary elements in local élites and mocking democracy, all in order to keep labour costs as low as possible. Whether the same strategy will work for another 100 years is a different matter altogether.

Resistance to the Big Three's banana operations is coming from another direction as well – from the banana plants themselves and the very eco-system in which they grow. The poisons plantations use in vast amounts are becoming less effective: lethal diseases, like the dreaded Black Sigatoga, are developing immunity to all the available pesticides.

The industry is also sitting on a genetic time-bomb. The plants used for the export trade have a very narrow genetic base. One expert warned some time ago: 'Bananas constitute perhaps the best example in the history of agriculture of the pathological perils of monoclone culture... Indeed, without clonal diversification, the trade can hardly be expected to survive indefinitely.'[11] Genetic modification may be the only remaining option, but that too would certainly be met with consumer resistance. Add to this the increased incidence of devastating hurricanes, and the fact that many of the plantations in Central America are nearing the end of their useful life, and the long-term future of the entire operation begins to look very shaky indeed.

Finally, 'quality' in the retail business is still only skin-deep. It has everything to do with appearance, with the way bananas 'present' themselves on superstore shelves: the brightness of the yellow, the spotlessness of the skin, the imposing size. Customers are not told what these bananas actually *are*; that the bright, spotless monster is the progeny of deadly chemicals that add nothing whatever to nutritional value or taste. So the trade still relies on consumer ignorance at a time when food-security scares are proliferating and industrial methods in agriculture are coming under closer public scrutiny than ever before. The more people know about the way most of the bananas they eat are produced, the less reassured they are likely to be.

Putting on a friendly face

So the Big Three appear to have few remaining options but to 'diversify' into cosmetics. For example, in 1992 Chiquita joined the Better Banana Project launched by the New York-based Rainforest Alliance. The point of the project was to allay growing consumer unease about the standard Chiquita-style banana – and spike the guns of its critics. Dole and Del Monte are involved in similar initiatives. However, the criteria for certification by the project are so broad, the inspection regime so limited and the precise financial relationship between the participants so unclear that the Better Banana looks very much like a Greenwash Banana. Nowhere in Guatemala did I encounter anyone who had ever heard of it, let alone noticed the difference.

But if the 'dollar' banana is in trouble, the 'Euro' banana isn't in much better shape. For sure, by any measure this banana is pretty harmless. It also has the great virtue of introducing into world trade other considerations than mere cheapness and competition. The trouble starts, however, when you look in more detail at what these other considerations are.

The European Union (EU) banana regime is colonial in its origins. In technical terms it is 'mercantilist', since its purpose is to guarantee supplies from former colonies by giving them quotas and raising tariff barriers against everyone else. France still regards its banana-producing colonies in Martinique and Guadeloupe as 'Overseas Departments', and therefore part of France. When Britain joined the 'Common Market' in 1973, a separate deal was agreed for bananas coming from its former colonies. The first Lomé Convention in 1975 formalized a preferential trade status similar to that accorded to bananas across a range of commodities from some 42 former colonies of Europe in Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific (ACP). The idea was to provide transitional support to these very poor, often newly independent countries – until they could take care of

What is it that attracts world trade so unfailingly to the worst option?

Fair trade on Volta Estates in Ghana – the potential is there.

RON GILING / STILL PICTURES

themselves on world markets.

Bit by bit, these 'transitional' Lomé arrangements have been eroded ever since, principally by the Single European Market, which abolished preferential access to individual European countries after 1992. The Byzantine Euro 'regime' is the result. No-one seriously believes that when Lomé is renegotiated again next year its benefits will not be diluted still further – 'Lomé fatigue' has set in.

The trouble with colonial regimes is that they are devised by colonial powers in their own interests. It's a very hard habit to kick. So, while the Euro banana costs upwards of $1 billion every year to maintain, very little of the cash has reached the banana growers in the South, remaining instead in the firm grasp of traders and retailers in the North. No wonder the growers are simply throwing in the towel. What they then discover is that the supposed 'transition' has not happened – there is no other living to be made. The Windward Islands remain as dependent today as they ever were on preferential treatment by their former colonial masters in Europe.

Moving the goalposts

In the meantime, the goalposts of world trade have been moved. In 1995 the WTO was established with a new set of rules to enforce 'free trade' worldwide. In the banana business, that meant favouring the currently 'cheap' but otherwise obsolete dollar banana of the Big Three – and ruling the Euro banana, with its quotas and tariffs, illegal.

Unfortunately, the WTO is the kind of institution that can produce a 400-page adjudication on just one aspect of the banana dispute. Backed up behind this dispute are all sorts of others, the superficially trivial symptoms of much deeper and more serious conflicts – over the future of genetically modified organisms, for example. What powerful corporations expect of the WTO is that it should enforce price competition as the sole measure of free-market values, excluding altogether what are called 'Process and Production Methods' – the way things are made.

The purported reason is that 'protectionism' would otherwise proliferate at the behest of national governments and special-interest groups. This line of reasoning is, as the saying goes, one banana short of a bunch. Trade is not just a dispassionate observer of world events – it's an active participant. Because the abuse of human rights and the environment make for the cheapest products on world markets, there's an incentive for producers to engage in both. The full price still has to be paid, but the rules of the WTO are there to ensure it is paid in the currency of human suffering and environmental degradation. There are now, however, few serious economic arguments for excluding such 'external' costs from the final price of a product. If there is a function for the WTO, then it is to create a 'level playing field' on the firm ground of basic, universal standards of human rights and sustainability, not on the wind-swept swamps of outdated banana plantations.

Something must and can be done about this. The priority for the 'dollar' plantations is not that they should be closed down immediately, but that trade-union rights should be fully recognized, collective bargaining legitimized, working conditions substantially improved and much more significant steps taken to reduce environmental damage – and fast. If the result is a few more cents on the price of a banana in Benidorm, so be it.

Future perfect

Meanwhile, fair-trade organic bananas actually exist. The scale is still quite small, and the full potential remains to be explored – no-one seriously suggests, for example, that they can solve the immediate problems of the Windward Islands. More's the pity. But if even a fraction of the resources – research, government subsidies, political patronage – that are consumed by the 'dollar' regime were devoted to fair-trade and organic production instead, their true potential might be realized much more quickly than anyone presently imagines. Where organic production is not an option, fair trade can be developed nonetheless; where fair trade remains problematic, organic production is still possible.

One caveat often raised is that 'pre-industrial' production methods used for growing organic bananas will never be able to meet world demand. Of course there are problems with selling perishable fruit outside the tropics. But the fact that three-quarters of the world's bananas (which are eaten locally) are produced very differently – and much closer to the fair-trade organic model – suggests that the volume of supply is not a serious constraint. Besides, anyone who knows anything about bananas will tell you that the very best and tastiest have always been kissed by birds, with the marks on their skins to prove it.

Another caveat is that fair-trade and organic bananas cost more to buy in some countries. Does that mean they're a luxury, not for the relatively poor in the North? Well, in Europe we're already paying more for the Euro banana because of the current 'regime', but bananas have not become an exclusive product as a result. Again, if the same resources were shifted into organic and fair-trade production, then no significant price rises would be necessary at all.

Eventually, fair-trade and organic methods have to come together. Though organic production has real benefits for growers, without fair trade it merely reflects the self-interest and fads of consumers in the North. And though fair-trade principles may assist the development of organic methods – because, for instance, growers who control their own production are more likely to tackle the health hazards of pesticides – there's little point in a fairer industry that destroys its own environment.

In the long term, more fundamental questions will have to be answered: about the power and consequences of retail superstores in the North; about other key elements of the trade, such as shipping, insurance and finance. These in turn raise broader questions about the scope of democratic control, the function of government and the need for political change, that cannot be avoided indefinitely.

'Quality' in the retail business is still only skin-deep. It has everything to do with appearance: the brightness of the yellow, the spotlessness of the skin, the imposing size

The challenge to the supremacy of big banana business, particularly in Central America, has come from defiant labour unions, co-operatives and international solidarity. We are all indebted to them for the possibility of a sustainable future.

In the meantime, the simple fact of the perfect, fair-trade, organic banana is genuinely subversive – no-one can say it's impossible. If anyone tries, let them first produce a more shameful image than this: a woman in Guatemala washing bananas for the North, to remove all trace of the poison she must live with every day – as if she belonged to a different species altogether. ■

---

1 NW Simmonds, *Evolution of Crop Plants*, Longman Scientific and Technical, Harlow, 1976.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

'Before you've finished eating breakfast this morning, you've depended on half the world.'

Martin Luther King

The Banana Charter

Ever since a large international conference in May 1998, groups with an interest in the banana trade have been linking up around the world to develop a common project for change. The main action points include:

The World Trade Organization:
Member governments should add to existing agreements:

- *A social clause* to ensure the observance of International Labour Organization minimum labour standards.
- *An environmental clause* to ensure ecologically sound production practices.

The private sector:
Companies producing or trading in bananas should support and develop:

- *Freedom of association* for trade unions, and collective agreements.
- *Corporate Codes of Conduct* which are subject to independent verification.

Fair trade:

- *Labelling* based on standards set out by the FairTrade Labelling Organizations International (FLO).
- *Organic production* based on social and environmental standards set out by the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM).

The European Union regime:
A resolution to the current dispute is urgently required and should include:

- *Tariff quotas* with individual country quotas.
- *Preferential access* for ACP countries to remain, in accordance with Protocol 5 of the Lomé Convention.
- *Revenues* arising from the above invested in sustainability.
- *Import licensing* to permit market access to all operators – including fair trade – on an equitable basis.
- *Licence auctioning* with fee income used to encourage diversification and cost 'internalization' by producers and traders.

Buy organic and fair-trade bananas!

The World Trade Organization

In November there's a ministerial meeting of the WTO in Seattle. On the table are proposals for the next 'Millennium Round' of trade talks. The meeting will also be a focus for non-governmental groups to raise their concerns about globalization and free trade – including the WTO rulings on the Banana War. In particular there is a need to change the WTO rule (Article III) which prevents countries from favouring imports of goods which are more sustainably produced.

Action groups

AOTEAROA/NEW ZEALAND

More bananas are consumed here per head of the population than anywhere else in the world.

**The Soil and Health Association, PO Box 36-170, Northcote.
Tel: +64 9 443 8435.**

AUSTRALIA

Chiquita South Pacific are rapidly expanding in Australia and will need careful watching. The National Association for Sustainable Agriculture Australia (NASAA) certifies organic production in Australia, Papua New Guinea, Sri Lanka and Indonesia. A very good starting point for anybody seeking out organic produce, certification processes and the like.

**NASAA, PO Box 768, Stirling, South Australia 5152.
Tel: +61 8 8370 8455. Fax: +61 8 8370 8381.
E-mail: nasaa@dove.mtx.net.au
Website: www.green-pages.com.au/nasaa/index.html**

**Biological Farmers of Australia, PO Box 3404, Toowoomba, QLD 4350. Tel: +61 7 4639 3299. Fax: +61 7 4639 3755.
E-mail: bfa@icr.com.au**

**Good Foods Co-op, 91 Musgrave Road, Red Hill, QLD 4059.
Tel: +61 7 3369 0898. Fax: +61 7 3876 2757.
E-mail: goodfood@bit.net.au**

Eco-Consumer, c/o Queensland Conservation Council, PO Box 12046, Elizabeth Street, Brisbane 4002. Tel: +61 7 221 0188.

BRITAIN

Many groups, including the World Development Movement, Oxfam and Christian Aid, have been vigorously campaigning on the banana trade for several years. Links with the labour movement are particularly strong. There are plans to introduce a fair-trade banana in the near future. Banana Link has produced a detailed analysis of the trade in ***Bananas – towards sustainable production*** by Anne-Claire Chambron and Alistair Smith, as well as a regular ***Bulletin*** which is an invaluable source of information on the latest developments around the world.

**Banana Link, 38-40 Exchange Street, Norwich, Norfolk NR2 1AX.
Tel: +44 1603 765670. Fax: +44 1603 761645.
E-mail: blink@gn.apc.org Website: www.laslett.com/bananas**

**Fairtrade Foundation, Suite 204, 16 Baldwins Gardens, London EC1N 7RJ. Tel: +44 207 405 5942. Fax: +44 207 405 5943.
E-mail: mail@fairtrade.org.uk**

BANANZA
GUATEMALA
BONITA
ECUADOR
BANANAS
MAX HAVELAAR
KEURMERK/GARANTIE
Product
Nobility
of
Costa Rica
ONKEL TUCA
BANANAS ORIGINALES
ECUADOR
Gosa
Banana
Dole
Rättvisemärkt
RED BANANA
PLU #4236
melissa's
TURBANA
#4011

CANADA

The Fair Fruit initiative has been launched, under the umbrella of the Vancouver Food Policy Organization, to raise awareness. Focusing initially on bananas, the group is planning to import and market fair-trade fruit to British Columbia, then expand to other parts of Canada, carrying the *Transfair* label provided by Fair TradeMark Canada. The International Development Research Centre has also attempted to import a variety of banana, the Mona Lisa, which is more resistant to the fungus Black Sigatoga, and is grown organically in Costa Rica.

Fair Fruit, c/o 2524 Cypress Street, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada V6J 3N2.
Tel: +1 604 736 7678. Fax: +1 604 736 9646.
E-mail: van@oxfam.ca
Website: www.web.net/fairfruit

Fair TradeMark Canada, 323 Chapel St, 2nd Floor, Ottawa,Canada K1N 7Z2.
Tel: +1 613 563 3351 (Toll-free +1-888-663-FAIR).
Fax: +1 613 237 5969.
E-mail: fairtrade@cyberus.ca
Website: www.web.net/fairtrade.ftmc/fair3.html

EUROPE

Fair-trade bananas are already available in the Netherlands, Switzerland, Denmark, Belgium and Sweden. Launches are planned in Austria, Luxembourg and Finland. The European Fair Trade Association (EFTA) produces the ***Fair Trade Yearbook*** covering bananas, cocoa, coffee, rice and others. The European Banana Action Network (Euroban) is a coalition of organizations in 13 European countries and can be contacted via Banana Link (see Britain above) or:

Irish Fair Trade Network, 17 Lower Camden Street, Dublin 2, Ireland. Tel/Fax: +353 1 475 3515.
E-mail: euroban@pobox.ie
Website: bananas.agornet.be

FLO International, Kaiser Friederich Strasse 13, 53113 Bonn, Germany. Tel: +49 228 949 2322.
Fax: +49 228 242 1713.
E-Mail: h.lamb@fairtrade.net

European Fair Trade Association (EFTA), Witmakersstraat 10, 6211 JB Maastricht,
The Netherlands.
E-mail: EFTA@antenna.nl

LATIN AMERICA

The best initial contact for the labour movement is:

COLSIBA (Coordinadora Latinoamericana de Sindicatos Bananeros), Apartado Postal 4128 SPS, La Lima, Departamento de Cortes, Honduras, Central America.

UNITED STATES

The TransFair Foundation has plans to launch fair-trade bananas shortly. Organic bananas are imported primarily from the Dominican Republic, Mexico and Honduras.

TransFair USA, 52 Ninth Street, Oakland, CA 94607.
Tel: +1 510 663 5260.
Fax: +1 510 663 5264.
E-mail: tranfair@transfairusa.org Website: www.transfair.org

US-LEAP (Labour Education in the Americas Project), Stephen Coats, PO Box 268-290, Chicago, IL 60626. Tel: +1 773 262 6502.

WINDWARD ISLANDS

For all campaign contacts:

WINFA, PO Box 817, Kingstown, St Vincent and the Grenadines, Eastern Caribbean. Tel: +1 784 456 2704.

Also worth reading on bananas...

An excellent recent publication is ***Hungry for Power*** from the UK Food Group (PO Box 100, London SE1 7RT, +44 171 523 2369, http://www.ukfg.org.uk) which contains an authoritative chapter on bananas and equally informative analyses on baby food and transnationals such as the food giant Cargill, Monsanto, Zeneca (pesticides) and British American Tobacco. Puts the Big Three banana companies in the context of 'agribusiness'. Equally intriguing is ***The Political Ecology of Bananas – contract farming, peasants, and agrarian change in the Eastern Caribbean*** by Lawrence S Grossman (The University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill and London, 1998), which is particularly strong on the lives of banana growers in St Vincent, the background to the Banana War and the way the environment interacts with agricultural practices. It's still worth trying to find ***Bitter Fruit – the untold story of the American coup in Guatemala*** by Stephen Schlesinger and Stephen Kinzer (Sinclair Brown, London, 1982), a meticulous, spellbinding account of United Fruit and the politics of the business.

Banana masquerade at the 1999 Notting Hill Carnival.

Albert Brojka

Clare Harvey talks with the man at the centre of Albania's refugee crisis.

THERE are several Albanians present when I meet the Mayor of Tirana, but I'm immediately aware, even before introductions, which one he is. This large figure with thick silver hair and a firm handshake has a natural authority. This is the man who, three months earlier, had to deal with the influx of 100,000 Kosovar refugees into Albania's capital. I meet him a week after the peace agreement. Already half the refugees have left the city to go home. The Mayor explains he feels easier now, the worst is past. Outside, tractor-trailers piled high with children and mattresses manoeuvre through the dusty, pot-holed streets on the first leg back home to Kosovo. Inside, in the cool, leather-seated office, the Mayor reflects wearily on the biggest challenge of his career.

CLARE HARVEY

Mayor Albert Brojka has been in office since 1996. When his right-of-centre Democratic Party was in power nationally, his positions included minister of industry and minister of public works. The 1996 general election gave the Socialist Party overall control and Democrats like Brojka moved across into administrative jobs. Brojka says, however, that being mayor of Tirana has been harder than any ministerial position. In 1997 he had to cope with widespread civil unrest following the financial crisis resulting from collapsed pyramid saving schemes. And in 1999 he had the Kosovo crisis to deal with.

Brojka explains that he felt a personal responsibility to the refugees. In the first days of the crisis three thousand Kosovars were sleeping in Tirana's sports stadium, which has a crowd capacity of two thousand. 'It was March then, and it was very cold, and people were sleeping on the grass, and I was unable to do anything about it. All I could do was sit drinking coffee in a bar and watch,' he says. This frustration, combined with genuine compassion, compelled him to act swiftly and decisively: 'I was not forced to serve the Kosovars, but I am a citizen, and a powerful citizen, and I could not let these people suffer in this way.'

> *'These people have had relatives killed and houses burnt, we wanted to protect them and share our bread with them'*

Half of his staff were immediately assigned to help the refugees. In the early stages the city authority acted like an aid organization, distributing food and blankets, until overseas aid organizations were alerted to the problem. His staff worked in shifts to give 24-hour cover, and within a month the situation had begun to stabilize. Brojka feels that he has had to sacrifice his city to the refugees. The infrastructure in Albania is poor; the ageing and poorly-maintained water pipes lose 70 per cent of the city's water. Nevertheless, refugee camps had 24-hour water supply, whilst the rest of the city only had three hours a day.

The Albanian Government gave Brojka $15,000 to cover the needs of the 100,000 refugees. To date, he says, he's spent 20 times that amount, over half his annual budget for the city. He's going to try to get the Government to reimburse the money, but doesn't seem hopeful. He's a Democrat, it's hard to get money from the Socialist government. He sighs, 'I have to explain to the people of Tirana that I can't invest money in the city because of the refugees. I hope they will understand and support me.'

At the height of the panic and chaos that ensued when the refugees started arriving, Brojka realized that there was a genuine threat of destabilization in the city. He appealed to the Tiranans to host refugees in their own homes. As many as three-quarters of Kosovar refugees were able to stay with Albanian families, a figure that the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees says is unprecedented in this kind of situation. 'I appealed to the people. I said: "We cannot accommodate these refugees, but you can, in your own houses." Albanians consider Kosovars our brothers, so we opened our homes.' He leans forward to make the point: 'In my city many families are on social assistance, they are unemployed and get only $20 per month to support their families. They are poor, but they are rich in their hearts. Everybody wants to help the refugees. These people have had relatives killed and houses burnt, we wanted to protect them and share our bread with them.'

Now the refugees are returning, and taking the world's press and approximately 200 aid organizations along with them. I ask him what it's like now the refugees are going home, and the West's attention shifts focus to Kosovo. It will be hard, he says, because the foreign visitors brought money and employment to the city. During the crisis translators could command up to $500 per day, a fortune in comparison to the $100 per month salary for government workers in the city. The money's gone, the attention's gone and Tirana is left to pick up the pieces. I wonder if this makes him feel bitter at all. He is reassuringly philosophical: 'We've lost some of the privileges that come with foreigners being here, but for us, solving the Kosovar crisis was the priority.'

Despite the cost and the disruption, Brojka feels something positive has come out of the situation, because it has brought Albania worldwide attention. 'The international community is focussed on the region now, this is a real chance for Albania,' he says. He feels that the crisis in the region stems from the breakdown of communism in 1990. Brojka thinks that the West, having seen how well Albania responded to the refugees, has a duty to help Albania in its transition to democracy. 'The way we responded to the crisis is truly Albanian. We showed the world that we are tolerant and that we have real values. We belong to the West and the West must support us.'

His colleague sitting next to Brojka on the sofa chuckles at this impassioned plea. 'Just you wait,' he says, 'after the elections next year this man will be President.' Brojka shrugs noncommittally. He jokes that after the last few months he's ready for a holiday. ■

Clare Harvey is a UK-based journalist who covered the Kosovar refugee crisis in Albania.

Reviews

music

Shri Durga

by **Cheb i Sabbah**
(Nation Records NRCD1075 CD)

Sacrifice To Love

by **Rizwan-Muazzam Qawwali**
(Real World CDRW79 CD)

dj Cheb i Sabbah
shri durga

History repeats itself: either that, or memories are short. In the ten years since club music has taken off in the West – to the extent that it eclipses its more traditional guitar-based sibling as the dominant chart force – people have been talking about trance-inducing sounds again and going back to the sources of ritual music. Alongside this, there have always been a few musicians with a genuine intention to tease out some real collaborations.

Cheb i Sabbah, an Algerian-born, San Francisco-resident DJ is one such artist and his sympathetic approach to the devotional *qawwali* and *raga* forms that make up his foundation material is immediately evident. Combining a mighty cast list from some of the most respected names in the respective Pakistani and Indian fields, Sabbah went about making **Shri Durga** in an unusual way. Creating his own samples and percussion loops first, he then invited musicians to perform over the top of them. A risky undertaking: the material Sabbah was commissioning was so structurally complex that one false move could have resulted in a cross-cultural collision. With the wonderful Bill Laswell helping out on bass, **Shri Durga** is nothing short of fascinating. The bass beats slowly in the background: there's nothing invasive about its presence. It even

books

Who Paid the Piper? The CIA and The Cultural Cold War

by **Frances Stonor Saunders**
(Granta ISBN 1 86207 029 6)

Red Lights and Green Lizards A Cambodian Adventure

by **Liz Anderson**
(Wayfarer Publishing ISBN 0 9534012 0 0)

Readers of the **NI** will need no reminding of how our world has been sullied by the dirty politics and destabilizations of the US Central Intelligence Agency. Lesser known, perhaps, is the vast and complex web of 'foundations' and slush funds by which the CIA sought to influence the artistic and literary life of Europe; a 'Cultural Cold War' running parallel to the military and political struggle with the Soviet Union.

Frances Stonor Saunders' fascinating book shows how, over more than two decades following World War Two, the CIA pumped millions of dollars into the cash-strapped European cultural scene in a covert attempt to woo intellectuals away from pro-communist positions and promote the view that US hegemony was benign and disinterested. The scale of the operation was staggering; few artistic endeavours, from art exhibitions to literary journals, were untouched by the insidious hand of the CIA and there were few intellectuals who did not, wittingly or unwittingly, take their share of this Yankee version of 'Kremlin Gold'. In these years the CIA operated, in effect if not in intention, as the US Ministry of Culture.

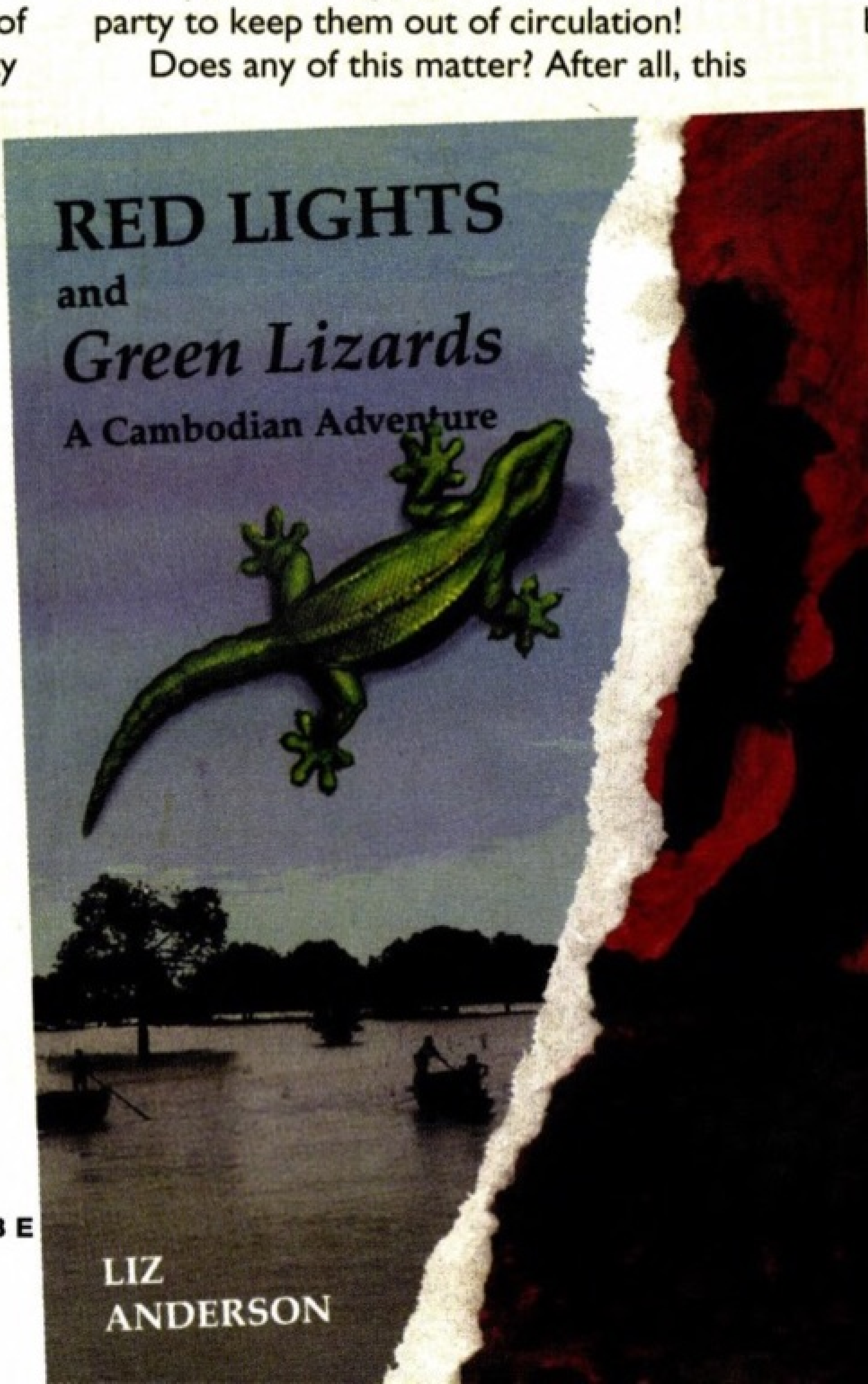
Interestingly, the CIA focused not on right-wingers but on the 'non-communist left' and people such as Arthur Koestler, Melvin Lasky and Stephen Spender were active participants throughout the whole operation. Central to the book is a detailed examination of the literary magazine *Encounter*, edited by Lasky and Spender, entirely CIA-funded and functioning, as one critic memorably put it, as 'the police review of the American-occupied countries'.

There were also moments of low farce and high comedy, as when Arthur Koestler's 1948 novel *Darkness at Noon* sold out rapidly as 50,000 copies were bought and distributed by the intelligence services and many more were purchased by the French Communist party to keep them out of circulation!

Does any of this matter? After all, this was the Cold War and the USSR had its own front-organizations and sponsored conferences. Stonor Saunders argues persuasively that the malign and corrupting effect of the operation springs directly from the dissonance between the stated aims of the US and the methods used by the CIA. Claiming to defend democracy and cultural freedom, and decrying any left bias among writers and thinkers, it peddled a stultifying pro-American party line in which what was defended was not 'democracy' but power and privilege.

Frances Stonor Saunders deserves credit for shining a light into this dark and shoddy corner of the US-European relationship. In a very real sense we are still bringing in the harvest from this pax americana; from the Cold War to Banana wars, from Vietnam to Kosovo the constant factor has been that the US has loudly proclaimed its altruism and benevolence while aggressively and single-mindedly pursuing its own partisan interests.

Politics ☆☆☆☆
Entertainment ☆☆☆ PW



Without doubt one of the most tragic casualties of Cold War politics was Cambodia. Liz Anderson's book **Red Lights and Green Lizards**, focuses on the post-War period from 1991 to 1993, when the country had just opened its doors to the outside world, resulting in an extraordinary mix of positive and negative consequences. Hers is a detailed, personal and above all humane account, set against a background of the continuing horrors of Pol Pot. A British doctor by profession, she offers a definitely Western perspective but her writing vividly communicates the courage, resilience and spirit of the Cambodian people.

Politics ☆☆☆
Entertainment ☆☆☆ NG

provides a solid basis from which the musicians can launch their awesome improvisations. An album very much in the spirit of collaboration of the late Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan and others, **Shri Durga** is a reflective and well-considered work.

Politics ☆☆☆
Entertainment ☆☆☆☆

Sacrifice To Love, the first major label debut from Muazzam and Rizwan Ali Khan, both teenage nephews to the aforementioned *qawwali* master Nusrat, is an altogether snappier affair. It's interesting that this should be so, for this is Pakistani Sufi music with nothing added in, certainly no club-friendly beats to please outsiders or to provide an immediate interface with other tonalities.

But it's apparent from the first few minutes that this music needs nothing other than itself to communicate. That's just as well – the lyrics translated from Urdu give only the gist of the four songs, not the ad libs thrown in when things get truly exciting. If four songs seems more like the length of an EP than an album, think again. Each one is some 16 minutes long and delivered with a speed and vigour that simply galvanizes the senses. *Qawwali* music, sung only by men, is part of a mystical tradition that concerns itself with songs in praise of Allah, the Prophet or a saint. The Ali Khans do, however, tackle one *ghazal* or love song. 'Pyar Hota Haty' (Falling In Love) is so replete with quickening intensity, tabla beats and harmonium sighs flying through the air, that only one is needed. While the basis of **Sacrifice To Love**'s music is traditional the framing belongs very much to the two brothers who, improbably young, have achieved something really remarkable. 'Allah Hoo Ya Rehman' in praise of Allah, wends its way upwards urged on by the sweet voices, lower than that of Nusrat, while the rise and fall of the harmonium creates the illusion of a shimmering heat. *Qawwali* is often thought of as trance music, but it's also entrancing. Let's hope that Rizwan and Muazzam won't for much longer feel the need to print their family tree on the CD sleeve.

Politics ☆☆
Entertainment ☆☆☆☆ LG

Reviewers: **Peter Whittaker, Louise Gray, Peter Steven, Nikki van der Gaag**
Reviews editor: **Vanessa Baird**

STAR RATING

Excellent	☆☆☆☆☆
Very good	☆☆☆☆
Good	☆☆☆
Fair	☆☆
Poor	☆

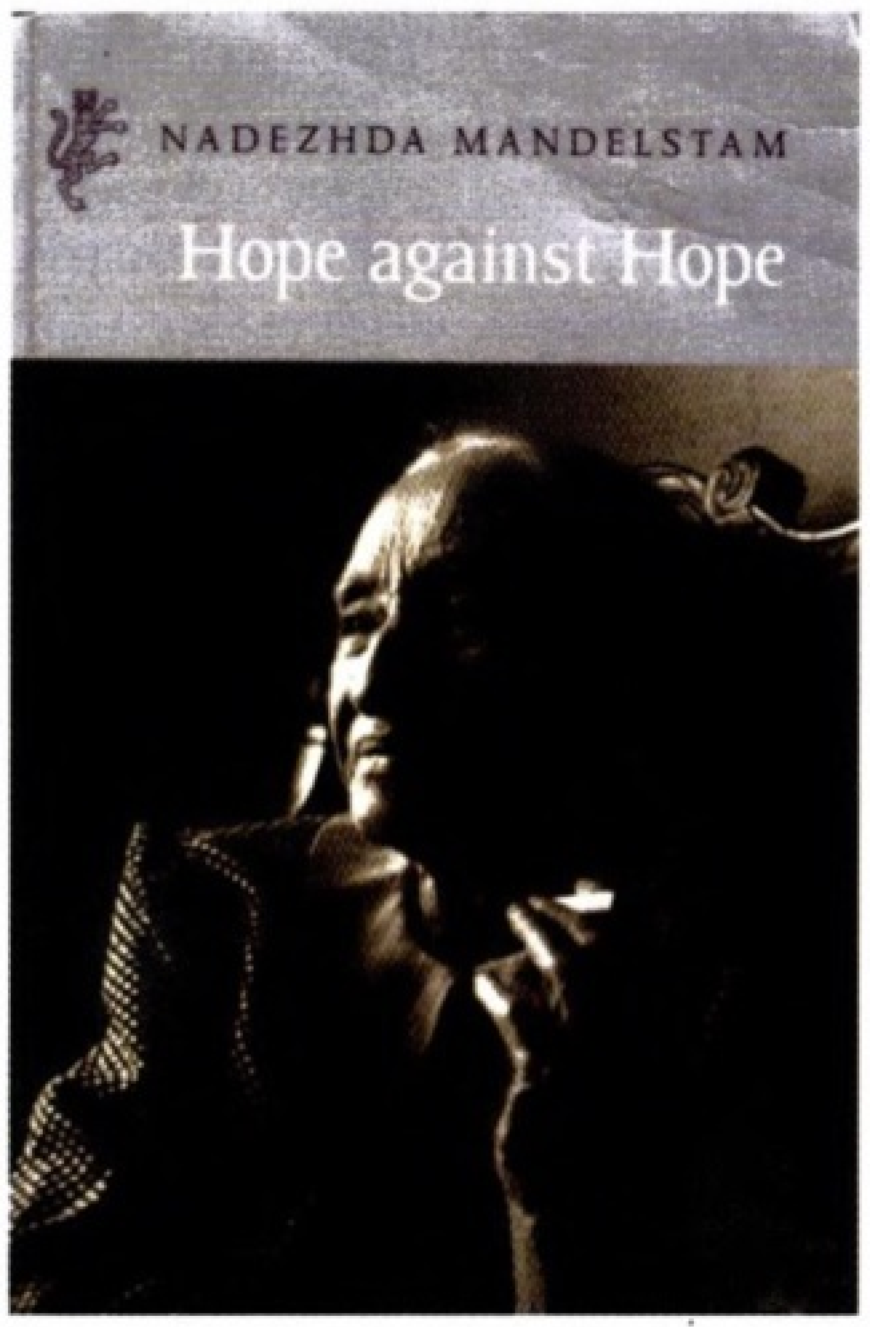
THE CLASSIC

Hope Against Hope

... being the story of love, poetry and honesty in times of evil and tyranny.

In November 1933 the Russian poet Osip Mandelstam wrote a sixteen-line satirical poem in which he denounced Stalin as a 'murderer and peasant-slayer', surrounded by 'a rabble of thin-necked leaders – fawning half-men'. He depicted him as 'forging his laws, to be flung like horseshoes at the head, the eye or the groin'. To write such a poem about such a tyrant at such a time was an act of either monumental folly or immense bravery. Mandelstam was immediately arrested by the Cheka, Stalin's secret police, interrogated and sent into exile in the Urals where he was constantly persecuted. The incessant hardships and harassment undermined his health and sanity; he suffered chronic insomnia and had a nervous breakdown. Although he was allowed to return from exile in 1937 and was offered a place in a state rest-home near Moscow, this was a typically brutal piece of duplicity by the authorities – he was re-arrested at once and died in 1938 while being sent to Kolyma forced-labour camp.

We owe what we know of these last four years in the life of the poet to his wife Nadezhda who was with him at both arrests and who accompanied him into exile. **Hope Against Hope**, her memoir of that time, first published in 1970, is both searingly honest and entirely free of self-pity. It is the clearest account we have of what it was like to descend into and live inside the maelstrom of purges and paranoia created by Stalin and his henchmen.



'My case will never be closed,' Osip is said to have once prophesied to his captors and it is largely through Nadezhda's unstinting efforts that the man the Soviet State did its utmost to obliterate remains such a fresh and important figure in world literature. Indeed, a strong case can be made that, had Nadezhda been less steely in her resolve and support in exile, Mandelstam would have been broken sooner by the regime and would not have lived to write his last great poems of exile. What is certain is that much less of his work would have survived his death; Nadezhda rescued and preserved from destruction many of his unpublished manuscripts. She remarks mordantly in her memoir that it was 'easier to save a manuscript than a man'.

The poet Joseph Brodsky has written: 'Of the 81 years of her life, Nadezhda Mandelstam spent 19 as the wife of Russia's greatest poet of this century, and 42 as his widow. The rest was childhood and youth.' When Osip and Nadezhda met in 1919, he had already published his first collection of poems, *Kamen* (*The Stone*) and was, together with Anna Akhmatova and Nikolai Gumilev, a leading member of the Acmeists writers' group, whose guiding principles of economy and precision were to underpin all that Mandelstam wrote. His second volume, *Tristia*, dedicated to Nadezhda and published in 1928, was – apart from some essays, literary criticism and a novella – the last of his work published in his lifetime or indeed until after the death of Stalin in 1953.

Nadezhda's writes of their life in exile in a cool, almost haughty fashion; what could so easily have been an all-too-familiar litany of the horrors of living under an oppressive system becomes, in her hands, something much greater. Her book is at once a deeply personal and harrowing account of a love affair that withstood a vast and evil tyranny and also stands as a testament to the many millions whose lives were destroyed by Stalin. It is also, almost incidentally, the best description of the actual process of creating poetry that you are ever likely to read.

Mandelstam continued, in prison and in exile, to produce work which, while it maintained his fatalistic, detached stance, managed to shout defiance at his oppressors, as with this, from his 1937 poem *I am not yet dead, I am not yet alone*:

> 'Unhappy is he who, as by his own shadow,
> Is frightened by the barking of dogs and mowed down by the wind,
> And wretched is he who, half-alive himself,
> Begs a shadow for alms.'

The date and circumstances of Mandelstam's death remain unclear; the totalitarian bureaucracy had no incentive to be meticulous about such information or, indeed, about informing relatives. Nadezhda was informed in the most roundabout and callous way imaginable. She was called to the local Post office and handed a parcel she had sent to Osip. 'The addressee is dead,' the young clerk informed her.

Hope Against Hope is a sustained salute to the human spirit and a ringing affirmation that the central tasks of the artist in the twentieth century have been to bear witness, to record and to maintain, even in the gravest circumstances, without expectation, without reprieve, the best that humanity is capable of. It is entirely fitting that, in Russian, Nadezhda means 'hope'. ■

Peter Whittaker

Hope Against Hope by Nadezhda Mandelstam is published by The Harvill Press, London, 1971/1999 (ISBN 1860466354).

Reviews

Troubled characters and a world throbbing with life and bawdy energy.

film

Gadjo Dilo

directed by **Tony Gatlif**
(distributed by Lion's Gate Films, Toronto)

In 1993, director Tony Gatlif grabbed considerable attention and international renown for his documentary on gypsy music, *Latcho Drom*. That film, with its impressive trans-European narrative has now become a cult favourite – especially for its soundtrack. Gatlif, himself of Rom (or gypsy) descent, laced the film with a wide range of music, from the traditional sounds of northern India to the cosmopolitan frenzy of professional musicians in modern Spain.

Gadjo Dilo takes up many of the same themes but with a very different approach. While *Latcho Drom* moved rapidly from east to west, touching down in many countries in rough parallel to the Rom migrations into Europe, the new work takes us in the opposite direction into rural Romania with a story 'told' through a young Frenchman.

Gadjo Dilo – which means 'welcome stranger' – begins with a solitary traveller. A young man trudges along a country road, the sound of his winter boots loudly crunching in the slush of late winter. After a time the cold sound of the snow takes on a rhythm of its own, perhaps metaphorically the beat of country life that sustains gypsy culture in Eastern Europe.

Gatlif is trying something more familiar and for that more difficult because his film is told through the conventional genre of social realism.

Although joyous music provides the emotion and the themes of racism and migration provide the political meat, **Gadjo Dilo** is framed as a love story linking the stranger with a young woman who is at first reluctant and suspicious. Stéphane, the young stranger, is a French ethnography student, eagerly setting out to capture the rich beauty of gypsy music on his tape recorder.

Izador, an old gypsy, gladly takes him in but others in the community prove harder for Stéphane to win over. A search for famous Rom musicians takes the pair out into the surrounding towns and eventually to the night-life of Bucharest. As in *Latcho Drom* the music becomes more complex and cosmopolitan as the story takes us from farm to nightclubs.

But there's a sinister edge to Gatlif's story. Not only is Romanian racism toward the Rom both open and harsh, but many of the characters in the extended Rom family are less than perfect themselves. Gang and mafia-like activity run through both the dominant and the marginalized groups.

Izador's son is a thug, probably recruited during a recent stint in prison. And even the open-minded Izador reveals, in his usual drunken state, an oppressive and debauched streak that serves to rip from his character any romantized feelings that viewers may feel for him.

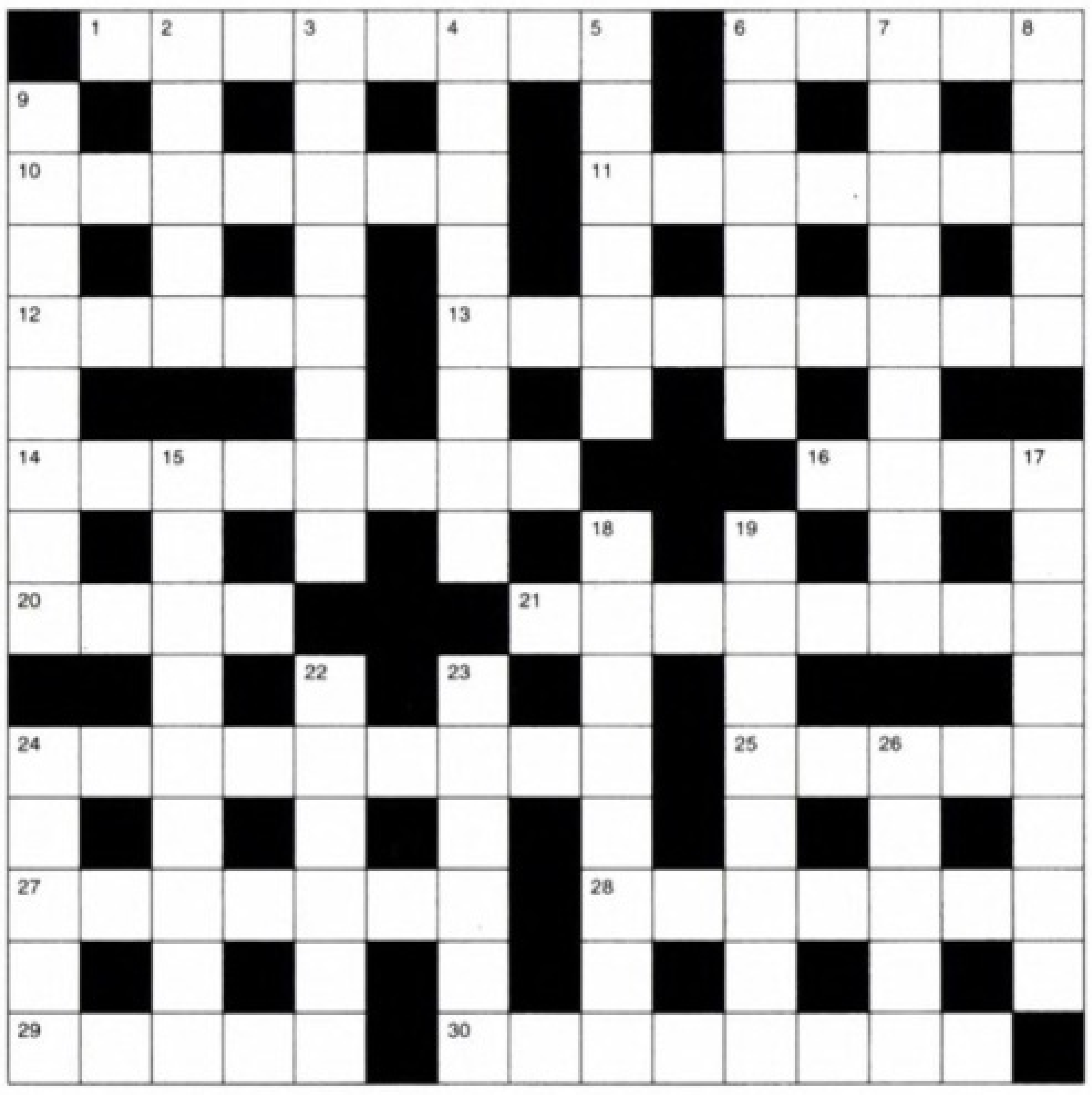
This is a dark work, a more bitter pill to swallow for the exuberant midnight-movie crowd who rocked the aisles for *Latcho Drom*. In a way it seems an antidote to the earlier almost carefree vision. But even with its troubled characters, its fictional world throbs with life and bawdy energy.

As viewers might suspect before the final scenes play out, our young ethnographer eventually learns through hard lessons that gypsy life embraces far more than its music. Its culture and the messy human lives of its people may prove impossible for an outsider to capture on cassette.

Politics ☆☆☆☆
Entertainment ☆☆☆☆ PS

The NI Crossword

No. 37 by Axe



CRYPTIC

Across

1 Animal's put down after number returned (8)
6 Indian poesy anthology (5)
10 A Jewish leader omitted British Christian – good chap – for a Middle East specialist (7)
11 Latin-type Quixote, for example, discards shirt (7)
12,20 Avoid urban area in Kansas (5,4)
13 Roar around South Sea Island, discovering one of the Cook's! (9)
14 I'm mixed up in the never-ending Angola problem, having love for the country (8)
16 Russian city swamped by salutes when in recession (4)
20 See 12
21 Family takes South African around the city (8)
24 Dig, so to speak, the dirt in Ohio or the North-east of England... (9)
25 ...mine tantalum, get little bread (5)
27 Studying in the South of England or Pennsylvania... (7)
28 ...boy's entered a Master of Arts here... (7)
29 ...a little Asian citizen who's originally caught between states (5)
30 Risorgimento fighter fatally dithers when around the South capturing king (3,5)

Down

2 Cunningly daub one in ancient Mesopotamian (5)
3 Which of the French take tea, reportedly – from poor Breton resort? (8)
4 Jerk's got chest inside with gold to the top, showing off self-sufficiency (8)
5 He takes in cheerleader's garb, raising African capital (6)
6 Eastern paper retrospective describing both the Arab and the Jew (6)
7 Write in style of Saul, bound by maritime influences? (9)
8 Ugh! No end to accountant's growth in Mexico! (5)
9 Medic struggling under the power of widespread infection (8)
15 Paris feature's not about Margot Fonteyn? (5-4)
17 Old Syrian 6 getting a degree in a near discipline (8)
18 Idle talk over protection for Caribbean islands (8)
19 Rent variable – shop around below a line on the map (8)
22 Sign the Sixties' fashion, for instance, is back on top (6)
23 Alternative to pound starting in Wales and Northern Ireland (6)
24 Company incorporates ancient city and papal court (5)
26 Tester of Mosel? (5)

S	■	P	■	S	■	E	■	A	■	P	■	T	■	A
I	C	E	L	A	N	D	E	R	■	A	R	R	A	S
N	■	R	■	X	■	D	■	M	■	R	■	E	■	I
G	A	S	C	O	N	Y	■	A	R	M	E	N	I	A
H	■	I	■	N	■	■	■	D	■	E	■	T	■	■
A	F	A	R	S	■	M	A	I	D	S	T	O	N	E
L	■	N	■	■	■	A	■	L	■	A	■	■	■	A
E	A	S	T	E	R	I	S	L	A	N	D	E	R	S
S	■	■	■	R	■	N	■	O	■	■	■	R	■	T
E	M	P	R	E	S	S	E	S	■	C	H	I	N	G
■	■	A	■	M	■	T	■	■	■	O	■	T	■	E
R	A	I	N	I	E	R	■	E	M	P	E	R	O	R
U	■	L	■	T	■	E	■	D	■	T	■	E	■	M
H	A	I	T	I	■	A	M	E	R	I	C	A	N	A
R	■	Ñ	■	C	■	M	■	N	■	C	■	N	■	N

QUICK

Across

1 Aquatic vole-like animal of North America (8)
6 Indian soldier or police officer at the time of the Raj (5)
10 Expert in, or supporter of, Islam, for example (7)
11 Of Latin origin (7)
12,20 'Cowboy Capital' at a rail head on the Santa Fe Trail (5,4)
13 Principal of the Cook Islands, home to the capital, Avarua (9)
14 Vast, empty Asian state, over 1.5m sq km in area (8)
16 Ancient Toltec capital in Mexico and a Russian city south of Moscow (4)
20 See 12
21 Capital of the Democratic Republic of Congo (8)
24 Major US city and former English administrative county (9)
25 Slightly leavened bread of the Middle East and Eastern Mediterranean (5)
27 English university town famous for its jail where Oscar Wilde was incarcerated (7)
28 Landmass whose name is attributed to the Italian explorer Vespucci (7)
29 Diminutive form of Azerbaijani (5)
30 Supporter of Garibaldi (3,5)

Down

2 Mesolithic culture of Mesopotamia, c 5000 BC, centred near Ur (5)
3 Fishing port, resort and 7 of Southern Brittany (8)
4 State of self-sufficiency with no international trade (8)
5 Capital of Zimbabwe, formerly Salisbury (6)
6 People and language descended from Noah's son, Shem (6)
7 Yucatan and Baja California are examples of this (9)
8 Sturdy houseplant originating in Mexico (5)
9 Covering a whole people, often used in connection with disease (8)
15 Gothic cathedral dedicated to the Virgin: building commenced 1163 (5-4)
17 Relating to an ancient people and language roughly equating to modern Syria (8)
18 Island chain, the southern end of the Lesser Antilles (8)
19 Line on a map or graph connecting similar climatic phenomena (8)
22 Constellation and a sign of the Zodiac (6)
23 Major coastal town of Maine (6)
24 Court of the papal see (5)
26 City of western Germany with Roman ruins (5)

Spice is nice, but war's a bore

Christopher Shewen knows why a war in Africa, fought between cousins, is ignored by the mainstream media.

ON the same day in May 1998 two things happened. Gerri Halliwell quit the Spice Girls and war broke out between Ethiopia and Eritrea. One story got full front-page coverage in Britain, the other a few meagre words buried in the deadground of a couple of broadsheets. The career change of a transient pop star cuts more media ice than half-a-million troops squaring up for the biggest current land war, between two of the poorest countries on earth. This is called the 'cuddliness factor' – spice is cuddly, a major war in Africa is not.

The mystery does not lie in the origins of this war – basically a common-or-garden border dispute – but in why it is almost unreported by the mainstream media. This is not a blink-and-you-miss-it, low-intensity guerrilla war. This is the full-on, 16-month-old, 600-kilometre-battlefront, 70,000-dead, corpse-strewn variety of war, featuring ethnic cleansing, mass deportations and six-digit refugee figures. As thousands died weekly during the heaviest fighting, the lead media stories in Britain were the royal wedding, Wimbledon tennis and – to be fair – Kosovo. There is a perception that war in Africa is like kids getting flu: annoying, inconvenient, messy, unavoidable... it happens, y'know. The same feelings seem to pervade the half-hearted international peace-brokering attempts, which generally have more political flavour than diplomatic effort and are seemingly driven only by the small potential kudos of success.

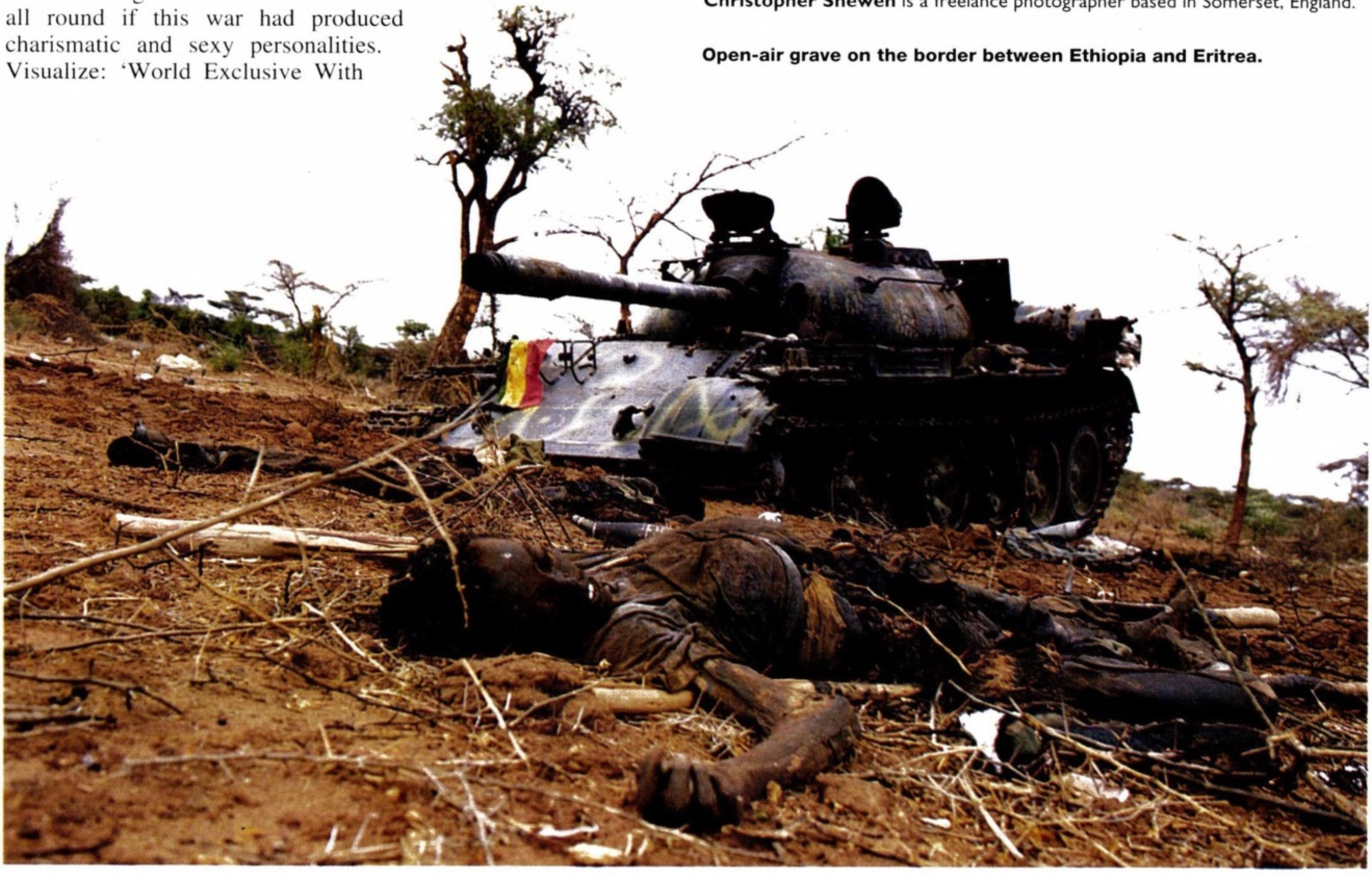
There might have been more interest all round if this war had produced charismatic and sexy personalities. Visualize: 'World Exclusive With Mysterious Commander X!' Cut to handsome Ché lookalike, chinbeard, red bandana, 'fighting for the people!' This is editorial dream material. Seventy thousand Africans dead in bloody trench warfare is not. An editorial eyebrow almost twitched when it emerged that a third of Eritrean combat troops are women. Perhaps there could be a feminist angle, or maybe a romance-in-the-trenches story. But it was all too far from home, and 'where the hell is Eritrea anyway?'

Many of the 268,000 refugees live under blue tarpaulins pathetically smeared with mud for camouflage, and they have been attacked by MIG fighters with 50-rounds-per-second fire capability, while suffering from malnutrition, disease and flooding.

Eritrea and Ethiopia share a common ethnicity with much cultural crossover, but there is no jingoism, only bitter disillusion, as both sides describe the conflict in fratricidal terms. In a war driven by a tiny handful of politicians, soldiers on both sides feel like murderers. The Ethiopian Army used its dissenting-minority tribespeople in their thousands as human mine-sweepers. Among the sun-dried death-grins on the battlefield corpses one can sometimes see the immature white teeth of boys as young as 14.

In the final analysis it's not a sexy story, there is no oil, no known minerals and no strategic value. Oh yes, and also they're Africans. After all, one million people have died in the continuing Sudan war, full in the face of world indifference. ■

Christopher Shewen is a freelance photographer based in Somerset, England.



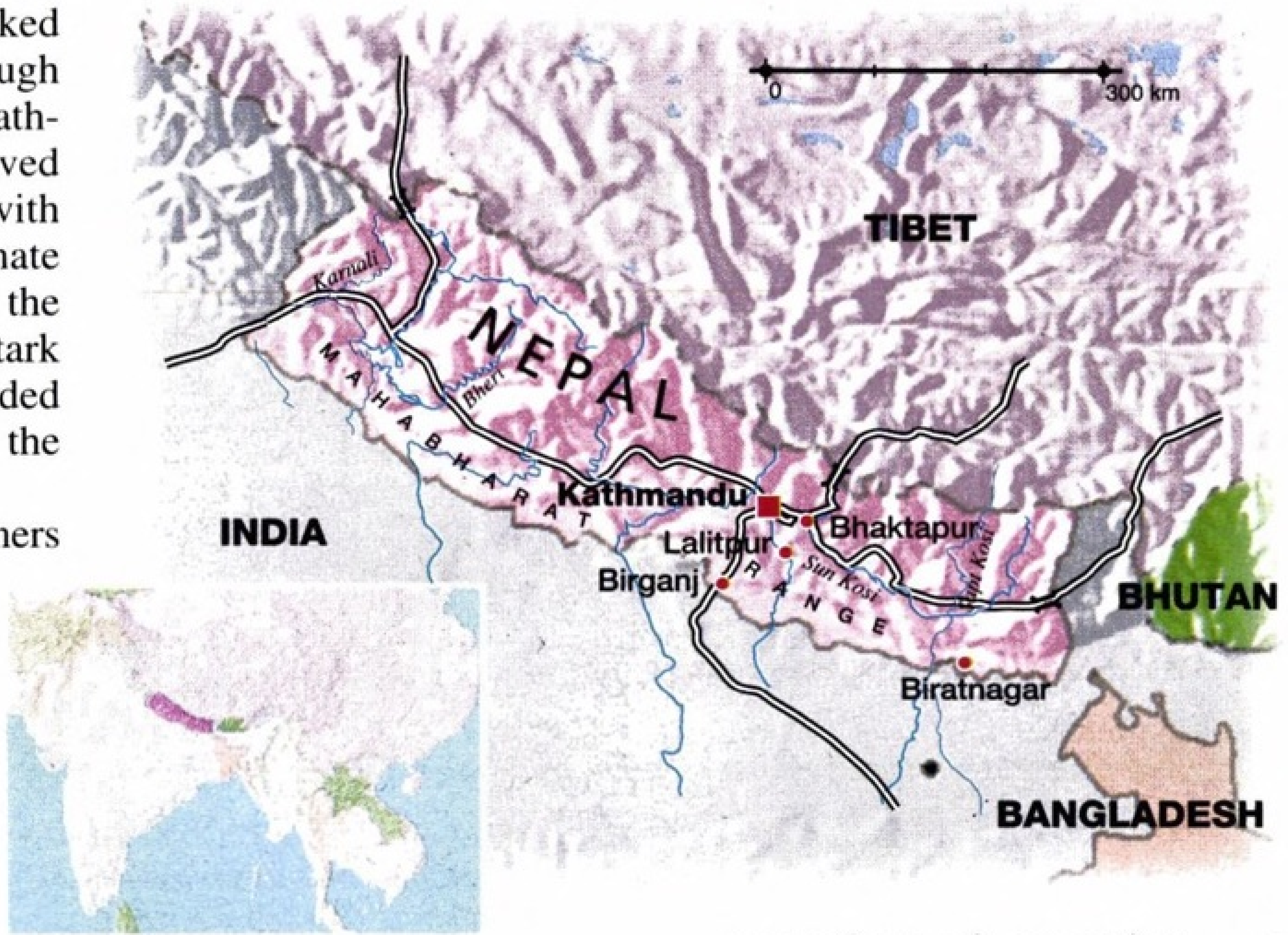
CHRISTOPHER SHEWEN

Open-air grave on the border between Ethiopia and Eritrea.

Country profile

Nepal

Narrow, diesel-choked streets wind through Nepal's capital, Kathmandu, past carved wooden temples, with gods and goddesses in passionate embrace. The chaotic din of the city's streets presents a stark contrast to the still, graded Himalayan foothills and the magnificent peaks beyond.



Since the 1960s Westerners have been drawn to Nepal for its ancient unyielding culture and its breathtaking landscapes. The country has changed enormously since then, politically, environmentally and socially. The 1990s have witnessed Nepal, on shaky and uncertain legs, attempting to climb to its feet with a new democracy.

Traditionally, Nepal was ruled by an ineffective monarchy. In the 1950s the first experiments with democracy were largely unsuccessful and in 1962 King Mahendra introduced the Panchayat system, prohibiting political parties and surrendering Nepal back to the power of the palace.

In 1979 an often violent national protest movement began and finally on 9 November 1990 it succeeded in achieving a new constitution, with King Birendra as constitutional monarch.

Since the first election in May 1991, won by the Nepali Congress, the political system has been plagued by corruption and internal strife; several coalition governments have formed and disintegrated, contributing to an ever-increasing sense of political insecurity. The latest of these coalitions was the unlikeliest, as pragmatic Congress joined forces with the Communist Party of Nepal/United Marxist-Leninist. The experiment lasted less than a year and in the latest elections this May Congress won an overwhelming majority with the Communists again in opposition.

The elections saw approximately ten people killed and accusations of corruption – as well as threatened violence in outlying areas by Maoist terrorist groups – though both politicians and the Nepalese media described the election as 'peaceful'.

Congress has made some positive changes in Nepal, with falling infant-mortality rates, improved medical facilities and increased access to clean water. Despite this, 60 per cent of the population still lives in poverty. Government strategies have so far mainly benefited the urban population and though a still-powerful aristocracy is now mingling with a new business élite, the gap between rich and poor remains substantial. Nepal has higher levels of child malnutrition than its main South Asian neighbours, as well as weaker health facilities – not to mention the worst adult-literacy rate in the world.

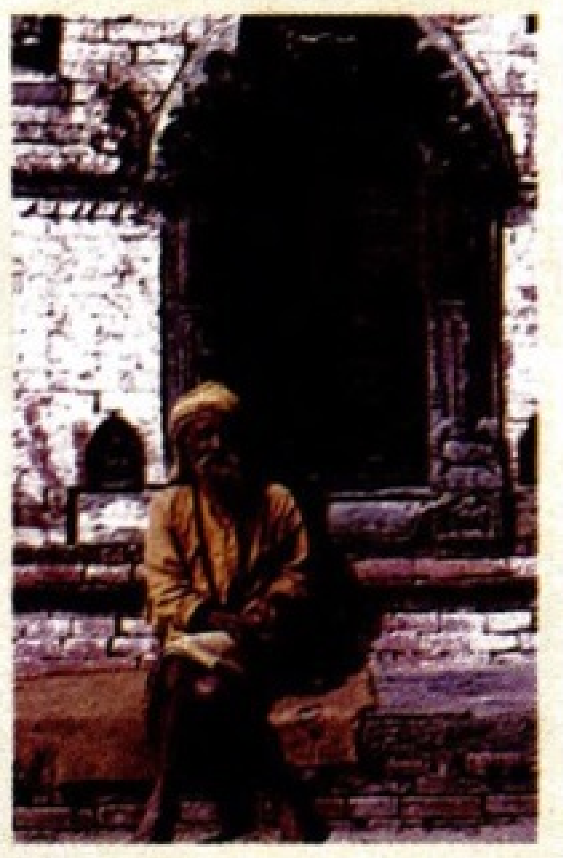
A growing population, depleting resources, increased development and impossible terrain, mean that life is getting tougher for those in rural villages. Environmental devastation has slowed down recently, but Nepalese soil and forests are still being exploited at alarmingly unsustainable levels. Most of Nepal's population is dependent on agriculture and the worsening conditions are forcing large numbers of peasant families to leave their land for an urban existence in Kathmandu and other centres.

In contrast, farming families in the Terai region (along the border with India) will often demonstrate great dignity in refusing to grow cash crops, claiming that it is sufficient to have food, shelter and access to maybe a radio and a bike.

The outlook is not all bleak: the Nepalese poor now have a political voice and though corruption is still a problem, they have increased power to choose who governs them. Although Nepal's flailing democracy has achieved limited success so far, it is still preferable to its autocratic past. ■

Suzanne Strong

AT A GLANCE


UNESCO DOMINIQUE ROGER

Leader: Prime Minister: Krishna P Bhattarai; Head of State: King Birendra.

Economy: GNP per capita $210 (India $380; Japan $40,940).

Monetary unit: Rupee.

Main exports: Woollen carpets and garments, jute products, hides, handicrafts. Publicity on the use of child labour in carpet making hit exports in 1995 but sales recovered the following year (without much change on the child-labour front).

People: 22.6 million.

Health: Infant mortality 75 per 1,000 births (South Asian average 78, Australia 5). Until recently Nepal was one of very few countries where men's life expectancy was greater than that of women: now they are just equal.

Culture: The Nepalese descend from Indian, Tibetan and Mongolian migrants. Nepalese 53%; Bihari 18%; Tharu 5%; Tamang 5%; Newar 3%.

Religion: Hindu 86%; Buddhist 8%; Muslim 4%. But the dominant Hindu faith has been heavily influenced by both Tibetan Buddhism and animism.

Language: Nepali (official). But half the population speak their cultural language first.

NI star rating

EXCELLENT	★★★★★
GOOD	★★★★
FAIR	★★★
POOR	★★
APPALLING	★

***Sources** The Economist Intelligence Unit; The World Guide 1999-2000; State of the World's Children 1999; Kathmandu Post & The Rising Nepal April - May 1999.*

Previously profiled January 1988

STAR RATINGS

INCOME DISTRIBUTION ★
The divide between the urban élite and the rural majority is widening as the urban economy booms and the agricultural sector declines.
1988 ★★

SELF-RELIANCE ★
Heavily in debt and dependent on foreign aid, as well as importing almost everything it needs.
1988 ★

POSITION OF WOMEN ★★
The constitution sets out a policy of non-sexism but on the ground conditions are little changed.
1988 ★★

LITERACY ★
An appalling 28% — the lowest adult-literacy rate in the world (South Asian average 49%, industrialized average 98%).
1988 ★

FREEDOM ★★★
The new democratic constitution protects individual rights but torture persists, as does child labour. Violence is still used to influence people's voting.
1988 ★★

LIFE EXPECTANCY ★★
57 years. Compares with neighbouring India's 62 years and a world high of Japan's 80 years.
1988 ★

POLITICS

NI ASSESSMENT ★★

The Government has presided over an economic boom for people in the cities but still takes far too little account of the rural poor. The test of the new democracy will be if it is meaningful enough to force politicians to fulfil the basic needs of the rural majority.

Republic of Trinidad and Tobago
Ministry of Planning and Development

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT FUND

NGO CONSULTANTS

The Community Development Fund (CDF) is a short-term effort of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, to mitigate the situation of the poor and vulnerable section of the population. The CDF Secretariat is in the process of compiling a database of local and foreign consultants **who have worked extensively with NGOs/CBOs** in the following areas of specialisation:

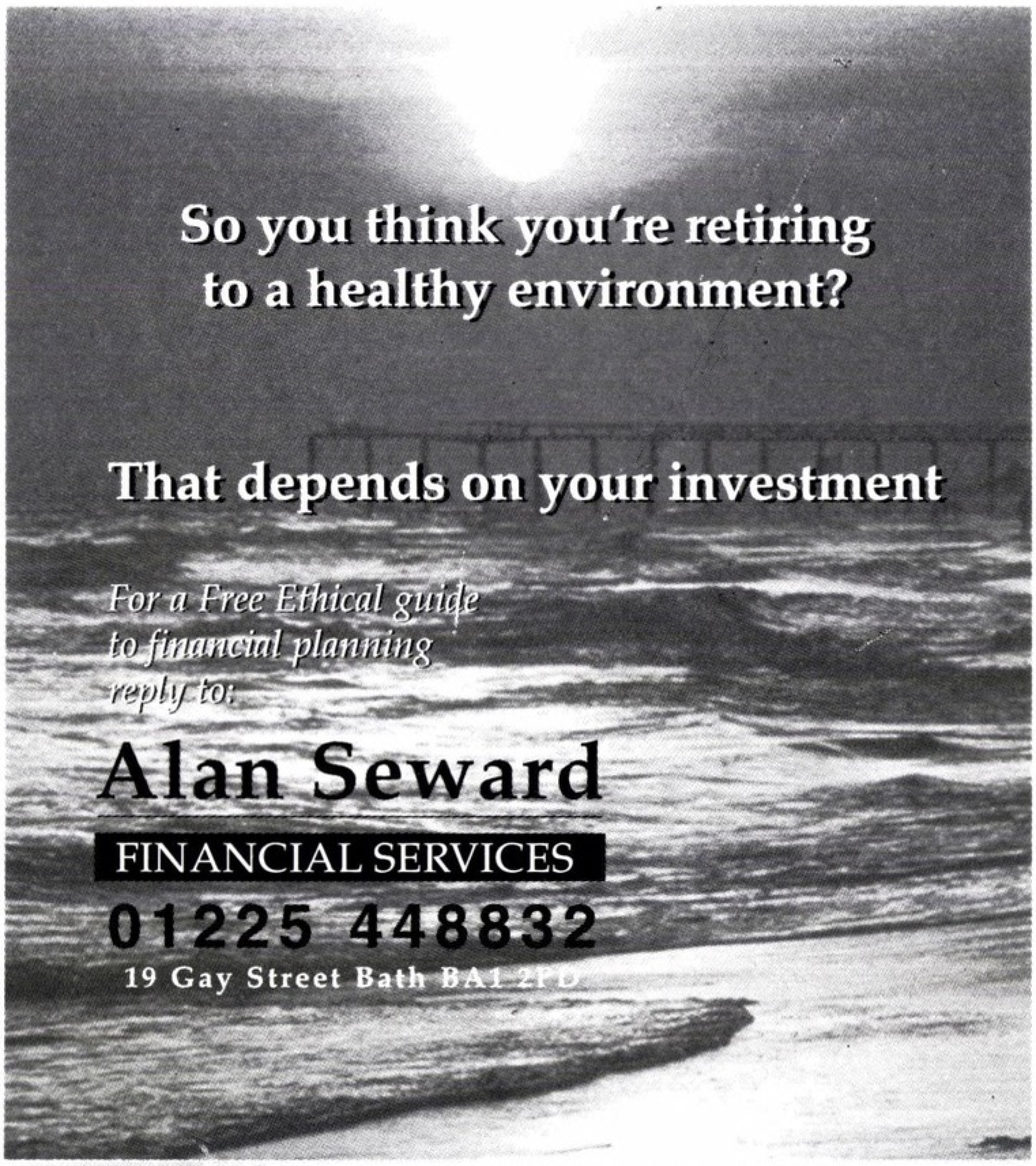
- **Training and institutional strengthening of NGOs & CBOs;**
- **Development of databases;**
- **Development of Networks and Umbrella Organisations**
- **Legal Framework and Legislation for NGOs/CBOs**
- **Research and Publications**
- **Training of trainers;**

Consultants should have at least five years relevant work experience of which, at least two, must have been spent working in developing countries. In addition to general professional qualifications consultants must possess the necessary qualifications to undertake consultancy work in the above specialised areas.

Consultants (**individuals and firms**) may be required to undertake different aspects of an institutional strengthening programme for NGOs & CBOs to be implemented by the CDF. If you are interested in being included in such a database please send CV/information to:

Community Development Fund Secretariat
Level 3, Furness Building
Corner Independence Square and Wrightson Road
Port of Spain
Trinidad, W. I.

Tel: 868-627-3646/50 Fax: 868-627-3631 email: cdf@tstt.net.tt



So you think you're retiring to a healthy environment?

That depends on your investment

For a Free Ethical guide to financial planning reply to:

Alan Seward
FINANCIAL SERVICES
01225 448832
19 Gay Street Bath BA1 2PD

Cut along dotted line fill in and return to Alan Seward Financial Services 19 Gay Street Bath BA1 2PD

PIA
A Member of Countrywide Independent Advisers Ltd which is regulated by the Personal Investment Authority for life assurance, pensions & investment business only

Please send me more information on Ethical investments
Name: ______
Address: ______
______
______
Postcode: ______
Telephone number: ______ Work: ______

The Open University

Postgraduate study in International Development Management

Are you a development professional? Would you like to be? Do you want to gain skills in managing development programmes in an international context?

The Open University's Global Masters and Postgraduate Diploma in Development Management offers innovative and challenging courses with an open entry route.

Recommended introductory course

- *Development: Context and Practice* addresses key contemporary issues in international development and development policy.

Core courses

- *Capacities for Managing Development* provides frameworks and skills for planning and evaluating development programmes.
- *Institutional Development: Conflicts, Values and Meanings* focuses on institutional change, its role in development, and how to work with some of the practical issues of institution building.
- The *Development Management Project* enables students to carry out some independent research on development management and write a 10,000 word dissertation.

All courses can be studied alone or as a credit towards the MSc degree.

Through OU supported open learning

Our unique method of teaching lets you study wherever you like and in your own time. The Open University uses a multimedia and interactive approach with teaching texts, readings, case studies, audio and video cassettes. You will also receive support from your personal tutor and Regional Centre.

Courses are offered twice yearly in May and November. For further information, please telephone 0870 900 0314, quoting reference GDM9K,or visit the Open University website at: www.open.ac.uk.

☎ **0870 900 0314**

THERE'S NO SUBSTITUTE FOR THE OU EXPERIENCE

Banana Link

The campaigning, research, lobbying and educational organisation that has been active in Europe-wide campaigns where the public have called on supermarkets and banana multinationals to improve working conditions on plantations – and for access for fair trade bananas into Europe.

Banana Link publishes a quarterly bulletin and has a range of resources for sale and hire. These are designed to enable groups to understand how the bananas we eat daily are produced and traded, and how our choices as consumers in the North affect workers and family farmers in exporting countries. Plus ideas for action.

- Teaching and information pack THE TRUTH OF BANANAS for group leaders, with ideas for discussion, role-play, quizzes and a banana game. Adaptable for all ages. £5 plus p&p.
- A colourful 16-panel exhibition THE COST OF BANANAS takes you on a journey through banana plantations to the Windward Islands, from chemical use in banana production to working conditions, and from the role of the WTO to environmental damage. Age 13 years and over. Small hire charge plus cost of carriage.
- Two sets of 20 slides a) Plantations b) Family Farms, illustrating the conditions in both the Caribbean and Central America. £20 per set.

A comprehensive list of educational materials (videos, photopacks, maps etc) on bananas and related issues is available on request.

Banana Link, 38-40 Exchange Street, Norwich, Norfolk NR2 1AX,
Tel: +44 1603 765670 Fax: +44 1603 761645, E-mail:
blink@gn.apc.org Website: www.bananalink.com
http://bananas.agoranet.be

JOURNEY LATIN AMERICA
Low cost flights and escorted group holidays. Fully bonded tour operator ABTA V2522 ATOL 2828 AITO. *Journey Latin America, 12 & 13 Heathfield Terrace, London W4 4JE, UK. Tel: 0181 747 8315*

SUNSEED DESERT TECHNOLOGY:
GREEN WORKING HOLIDAYS; ENVIRONMENTAL RESEARCH IN SOUTHERN SPAIN, DESERT RECLAMATION. SOLAR ENERGY, PERMACULTURE, SUSTAINABLE LIVING – LOTS MORE! COST £60/WEEK+ – FULL BOARD, SIMPLE ACCOMMODATION, VEGETARIAN WHOLEFOOD.
SAE: **unit-n, PO BOX 2000, Cambridge CB3 4UJ. Tel: 01273 387731**

The mystery of Life

Our lives are part of a vast evolutionary plan which has been known since the dawn of civilization, but only to a few.
Now its details are revealed in modern Theosophy, a rich resource for inquiring minds.

For further information please write to:-

The Blavatsky Trust
Dept. NI 2/B. c/o The Theosophical Society,
50 Gloucester Place, London W1H 4EA.

THE ANGLICAN PACIFIST FELLOWSHIP
(A Registered Charity)
believes that faith in Jesus Christ calls for the repudiation of all war.
We seek to witness to that belief within the Anglican Communion at all levels.
Enquiries to:
APF, 11 Weavers End
Hanslope, Milton Keynes MK19 7PA

Sanctions on Iraq:

BACKGROUND CONSEQUENCES & STRATEGIES

13-14 November 1999
Cambridge, England

Aimed at students and other interested members of the public or professionals, the conference will provide a grounding in the issues surrounding the situation in Iraq, through sessions given by academics, politicians, diplomats, aid workers and journalists.
There will also be sessions on the anti-sanctions movement in the UK.

Confirmed speakers include:
Dr Richard Garfield, expert on the effects of sanctions on civilian populations (Columbia University)
Ivor Lucas, former Head of Middle East Dept., F.C.O.

Full details from: 'CASI Conference', c/o Colin Rowat, 393 King's College, Cambridge CB2 1ST, UK
Email: soc-casi@lists.cam.ac.uk
http://linux.clare.cam.ac.uk/casi/

Campaign Agaisnt Sanctions on Iraq (CASI) is a registered society at the University of Cambridge

SERVAS
open doors,
open minds.

A worldwide network of travellers & hosts to help build international peace.

Details:
SERVAS INTERNATIONAL NI,
PO Box 1035, Edinburgh,
EH3 9JQ, UK.
or for Australia:
Kevin Newham, PO BOX 1086,
Airlie Beach, Queensland 4802,
Australia.

ETHICAL INVESTMENTS
Profit with a conscience
FREE impartial advice on ethical pensions, mortgages*, savings and life assurance.

KINGSWOOD Consultants
Independent Financial Advisers

Regulated by the Personal Investment Authority PIA Reg.No.52146

PIA

Founding Members of the UK Social Investment Forum

Please return this advert with your name, address & telephone no. for more details
FREEPOST Kingswood House, 29 North Street, Bicester, Oxon OX6 7NB
Tel: (01869) 252545 Fax: (01869) 240759
e-mail: mike@kingswoodconsultants.com
web: www.kingswoodconsultants.com
*Not regulated by the Personal Investment Authority

Programme Manager Afghanistan
Salary: circa £20,000
One year contract (renewable)

International charity, Children in Crisis, seeks Programme Manager, based in Kabul, to manage existing children's education & health projects, identify new projects & apply for statutory funding.

Rewarding position requiring experience in project design, implementation & monitoring in country undergoing conflict.

For further details & application form, send A5 sae or fax:

Colleen Earl, 4 Callco House, Plantation Wharf, York Road, London, SW11 3UB, UK, Fax +44 (0) 171 978 5003.
Reg Charity No. 1020488

JOIN US TO CELEBRATE CAAT'S 25TH BIRTHDAY!

Campaign Against Arms Trade is celebrating its 25th Anniversary. Join them for an evening of anti-arms trade entertainment!

Venue: Union Chapel, Compton Terrace, London, N1.
Date: Saturday, 9th October 1999
Doors: 7.00 pm

There will be contributions from: Mark Thomas, John Pilger, Beatrix Campbell, Martyn Gregory, Jeremy Hardy, Seize the Day, Frankie Armstrong & Leon Rosselson and many more.

£10.00 (minimum donation) or
£7.50 (minimum donation for low income)
Cheques payable to
Campaign Against Arms Trade
RSVP Rachel Harford,
CAAT, 11 Goodwin St,
London N4 3HQ
Tel: 0171 281 0297
Fax: 0171 281 4369
rachel@caat.demon.co.uk

CAMPAIGN AGAINST ARMS TRADE
25 Years 1974 1999

AIDS orphans children!

95% of all AIDS orphans have been in Africa. Only 1/10 of the world population lives in Africa. 7/10 newly infected with HIV live in Sub-Saharan Africa, with children under 15 years old the rate is 9/10.

There is a lot we can do. **Do you have the will to do something?** Join our 14 months solidarity worker programme and work with HOPE in Africa.

Start 1/2/2000. Info meeting in London.
Call Veronica +47 6126 4444.
One World Volunteer Institute, www.oneworldvolunteers.org
oneworld@online.no

one village

CUSHIONS...One Village brings you stunning hand embroideries from the Kathiawadi desert nomads of Gujarat. Vibrant colours and designs from their desert imagery.

- 100% handloom cotton with hand embroidery. 16"/40cm square unless stated otherwise. Prices for covers only, feather pads extra:
16"/40cm cushion pad 10886 £5
24"/60cm cushion pad 10884 £9

- **Order today, Freepost:**
One Village Direct (NI Offers), Freepost, Charlbury OX7 3BR
Please send cheque with order adding £3.50 towards UK p&p.

- *More choice in our cushions folder: phone for your copy 01608 811811 or write to* One Village, Charlbury OX7 3SQ

- **Above** Shining day and silvery night, idealized picture embroideries of day and night-time scenes. ***Shining day*** with sun and playful animals 08875 **£12.95**; ***Silvery night*** with moon and animals resting 08876 **£12.95**.
- **Left** ***Four Peacocks*** 08871 **£12.95**.

one village
From artisans' cooperatives

- **Above** Bolsters, complete bolster and embroidered cover, 75cm long x 28cm Ø. ***Red vine bolster*** 08751-10880 **£45.75**; ***Blue zappo bolster*** 08761-10880 **£45.75.** Also available in ***green*** 08781-10880 **£45.75.**
- **Above right** ***Blue zigger*** 08865 **£12.95** Also available in ***green*** 08866 **£12.95.**
- **Right** ***Green zappo*** 08869 **£12.95.** Also available in ***blue*** 08868 **£12.95.**
- **Right top corner** ***Red vine*** **24"/60cm 08752 £19.50; 16"/40cm 08753 £12.95.**
- **Right lower corner** ***Fruit of love*** **24"/60cm 08851 £19.50.**

The A-Z of World Development

CD-ROM

Requires:
WINDOWS 95
or WINDOWS 98
or WINDOWS NT WORKSTATION
or WINDOWS NT SERVER
or MACINTOSH system 7 or higher

The A to Z of WORLD DEVELOPMENT CD-ROM
Requires WINDOWS 95 or WINDOWS 98 or WINDOWS NT WORKSTATION or WINDOWS NT SERVER or MACINTOSH system 7 or higher
WORLD DEVELOPMENT
Compiled by
WORLD DEVELOPMENT

THE **A-Z of World Development** CD-ROM is the interactive production of the book of the same name. There are entries on more than 600 development topics ranging from Rastafarianism to Toxic Chemicals, from East Timor to Population. It includes some 250 pictures, 140 charts, graphs and maps together with all the text from the book.

PLUS

Some of the best and most up-to-date statistical information in the world, filed by every nation to the UN Statistical Office in New York. These **UN Social Indicators** include data on Housing, Health, Unemployment, Water, Literacy, Income and Economic Activity, Human Settlements, Youth and Elderly Populations. It is a superb reference point for any project needing backing statistical information.

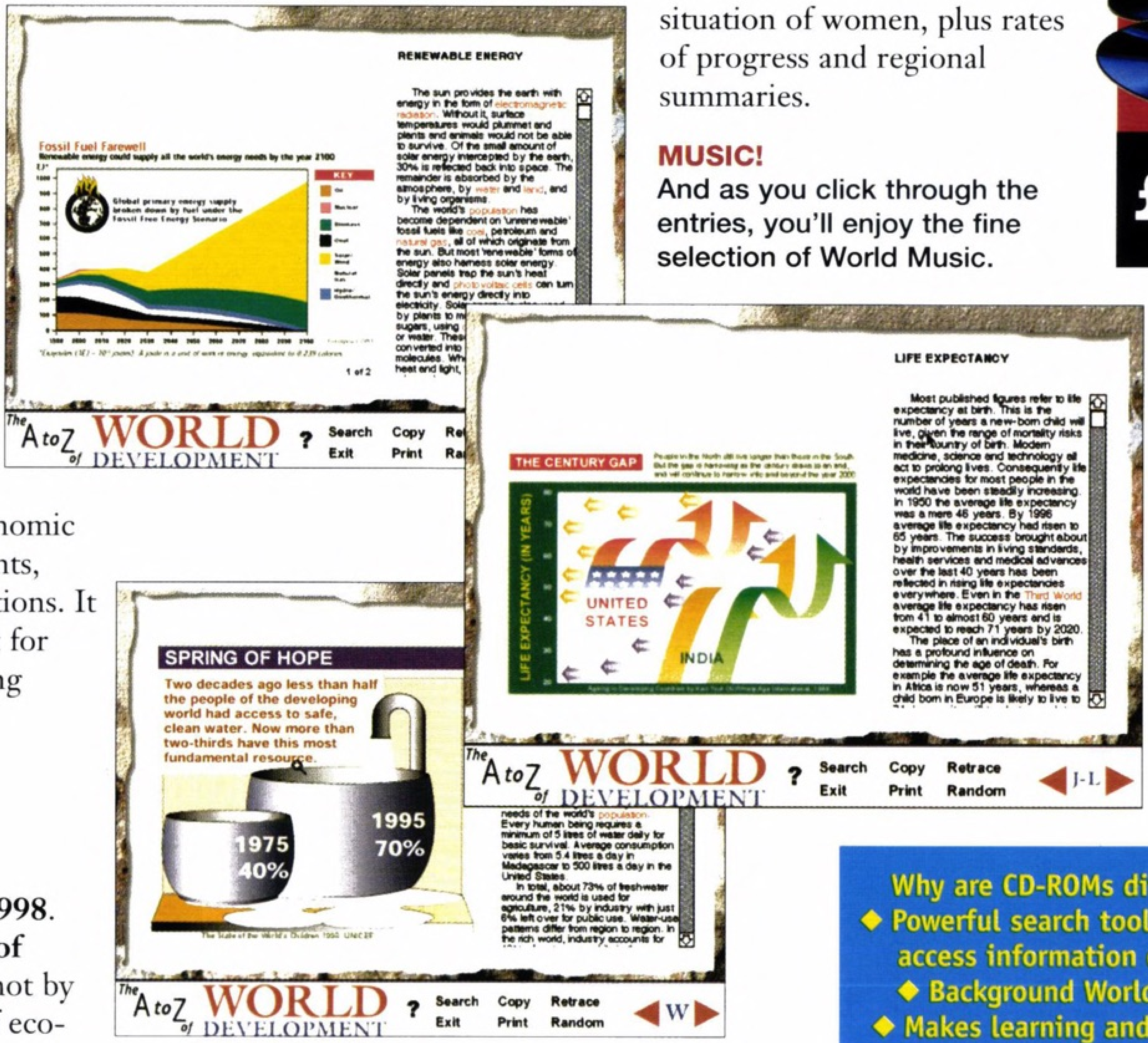
PLUS

Front-line UNICEF publications:

◆ **Progress of Nations 1998**. Each year **The Progress of Nations** ranks countries, not by the traditional yardstick of economic growth, but by the well-being of their children. Particular emphasis is paid to: civil rights, child immunization, adolescence and homelessness.

◆ **The State of the World's Children 1997 Report**. Includes:

- Progress over The Convention on the Rights of the Child
- Special focus on child labour. Over 250 million children worldwide – in countries rich and poor – work and many are at risk from hazardous and exploitative labour.
- Statistical tables.


Fossil Fuel Farewell
Renewable energy could supply all the world's energy needs by the year 2100
Global primary energy supply broken down by fuel under the Fossil Free Energy Scenario
KEY
1 of 2
The A to Z of WORLD DEVELOPMENT
?
Search
Exit
Copy
Print
THE CENTURY GAP
LIFE EXPECTANCY (IN YEARS)
UNITED STATES
INDIA
Retrace
Random
J-L
SPRING OF HOPE
1975 40%
1995 70%
The State of the World's Children 1996 UNICEF
W

RENEWABLE ENERGY

The sun provides the earth with energy in the form of electromagnetic radiation. Without it, surface temperatures would plummet and plants and animals would not be able to survive. Of the small amount of solar energy intercepted by the earth, 30% is reflected back into space. The remainder is absorbed by the atmosphere, by water and land, and by living organisms.
The world's population has become dependent on 'unrenewable' fossil fuels like coal, petroleum and natural gas, all of which originate from the sun. But most 'renewable' forms of energy also harness solar energy. Solar panels trap the sun's heat directly and photo voltaic cells can turn the sun's energy directly into electricity. Sola
by plants to m
sugars, using
or water. Thes
converted into
molecules. Wh
heat and light,

LIFE EXPECTANCY

Most published figures refer to life expectancy at birth. This is the number of years a new-born child will live, given the range of mortality risks in their country of birth. Modern medicine, science and technology all act to prolong lives. Consequently life expectancies for most people in the world have been steadily increasing. In 1950 the average life expectancy was a mere 46 years. By 1996 average life expectancy had risen to 65 years. The success brought about by improvements in living standards, health services and medical advances over the last 40 years has been reflected in rising life expectancies everywhere. Even in the Third World average life expectancy has risen from 41 to almost 60 years and is expected to reach 71 years by 2020.
The place of an individual's birth has a profound influence on determining the age of death. For example the average life expectancy in Africa is now 51 years, whereas a child born in Europe is likely to live to

Two decades ago less than half the people of the developing world had access to safe, clean water. Now more than two-thirds have this most fundamental resource.

needs of the world's population. Every human being requires a minimum of 5 litres of water daily for basic survival. Average consumption varies from 5.4 litres a day in Madagascar to 500 litres a day in the United States.
In total, about 73% of freshwater around the world is used for agriculture, 21% by industry with just 6% left over for public use. Water-use patterns differ from region to region. In the rich world, industry accounts for

◆ **The State of the World's Children 1998 Statistics**. These are vital indicators of care, nurture and resources that children receive in their communities and countries. They cover nutrition, health, education, demography, economic indicators and the situation of women, plus rates of progress and regional summaries.

MUSIC!

And as you click through the entries, you'll enjoy the fine selection of World Music.

£29.95

Why are CD-ROMs different?
◆ Powerful search tools help you access information quickly.
◆ Background World Music.
◆ Makes learning and information retrieval easier.

Site licenses are available;
please contact your nearest
New Internationalist Office for details or
e-mail jol@newint.org (UK) or
brianl@newint.com.au (Australia)

SEE ORDER FORM INSIDE THIS MAGAZINE

ISBN 1 869847 71 7

SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS: **Windows:** ◆ *486 DX processor or better* ◆ *8Mb RAM (16 Mb recommended)* ◆ **Windows® 3.1x** or **Windows® 95** or **Windows® 98** or **Windows NT®** ◆ *256 Color display or better* ◆ *Sound Card and Speakers* ◆ *2x speed CD-ROM drive or better* **Macintosh:** ◆ **Mac LC630** *or faster* ◆ *8Mb RAM (16 Mb recommended)* ◆ *color display* ◆ *System 7 or higher* ◆ *2x speed CD-ROM drive or faster* **All platforms:** ◆ *Web browser (e.g. Internet Explorer or Netscape Navigator)* ◆ *Hard disk space may be required to install optional Adobe Acrobat Reader (5-7Mb) and Microsoft Excel Viewer software (5Mb) in order to read the bonus information from the United Nations, UNICEF and the World Bank.* **Networks:** *This product has been designed and tested to allow network operation and should function properly in any Windows or Macintosh network, including in CD stacker environments.*

GUARANTEE: IF YOU ARE NOT HAPPY WITH THIS CD-ROM, JUST RETURN IT WITHIN TEN DAYS FOR A FULL NO-QUIBBLE REFUND.

Gifts from NI

1
NEW INTERNATIONALIST
One World Calendar on Time
January 2000
2
World in your Kitchen calendar 2000
3
eye to eye • childhood
4
eye to eye • women
5
Arno Peters World Map Jigsaw Puzzle
6
The Spices of Life
7
Wit and Wisdom of Africa
8
Sound Bites
9
The A to Z of World Development
10
The A to Z of World Development CD-ROM
11
The World in Your Kitchen
12
13
The World Guide 1999 2000
14
The World Guide 1999 CD-ROM
15
One Voice
16
Rhythm-time: Percussion
17
Unwired
18
The Little Book of Big Ideas
19
20

① **NI One World Calendar 2000**
Twelve outstanding panoramic photos, one for each month of the year.
Ref: 00CAL **£9.95**

② **World In Your Kitchen Calendar 2000**
Twelve pages, each with illustration, vegetarian recipe and room to write your appointments. One month to view.
Ref: 00KIT **£5.95**

③ **eye to eye: childhood**
The joy, the sorrow, the fun, the fear of growing up in Africa, Asia and Latin America. An anthology of fiction by the regions' top authors plus photos.
128 pages. Hardback with paper dust cover.
Ref: EYECH **£10.99**

④ **eye to eye: women**
Women's words and worlds. Collection of fiction by top women writers of the South plus illustrative photos.
128 pages. Paperback with flaps.
Ref: PEYE-W **£14.99**

⑤ **Peters Projection World Map Jigsaw Puzzle** NEW
With strong tub container and guide map inside. 650 pieces. For adults and children.
Ref: JIGMAP **£9.50**

⑥ **The Spices of Life**
Spicy recipes from around the developing world. 176 pages. Hardback.
Ref: FSPICH **£12.99**

⑦ **Wit and Wisdom of Africa – Proverbs from Africa and the Caribbean**
Collection of the oral Black tradition attractively presented with a range of African designs and motifs on the page.
228 pages. Paperback.
Ref: WAWAP **£9.99**

⑧ **Sound Bites – Quotes for our times**
Pithy, telling and funny quotes all with distinctive New Internationalist slant. Illustrated by top cartoonist.
126 pages. Paperback.
Ref: QFOT **£5.99**

⑨ **A-Z of World Development – a major reference book on global issues**
A first-rate reference book on key themes and ideas of global development.
272 pages. Paperback.
Ref: AZWDP **£24.95**

⑩ **A-Z of World Development CD Rom** NEW
Includes the book plus comprehensive collection of UN statistical information on every country in the world.
Requires WINDOWS 95 or WINDOWS 98 or WINDOWS NT WORKSTATION or WINDOWS NT SERVER or MACINTOSH system 7 or higher.
Ref: AZCD99 **£29.95**

⑪ **The World In Your Kitchen**
Vegetarian recipes from Africa, Asia and Latin America for Western kitchens with facts on countries and foods.
176 pages. Paperback.
Ref: FWIYKP **£9.99**

⑫ **NI One World Almanac 2000**
Photographic desk diary, one week to view.
Ref: 00ALM **£9.95**

⑬ **The World Guide 1999/2000** NEW
An alternative reference to the countries of the world compiled by journalists, academics and researchers from the nations of the South. 620 pages. Paperback.
Ref: BWG99 **£24.95**

⑭ **The World Guide 1999 CD Rom** NEW
Includes the book together with the Amnesty International Report for 1998, photos, music diagrams and maps.
Requires WINDOWS 95 or WINDOWS 98 or WINDOWS NT WORKSTATION or WINDOWS NT SERVER. Not suitable for MACINTOSH.
Ref: WGCD99 **£39.95**

⑮ **One Voice – vocal music from around the world**
Ref: MONEVC CD **£9.95**
Ref: MONEVT Cassette **£6.95**

⑯ **Rhythm-time: world percussion** NEW
Perfect introduction for lovers of rhythm around the world.
Ref: MTIMEC CD **£9.95**
Ref: MTIMET Cassette **£6.95**

⑰ **Unwired – acoustic music from around the world** NEW
Ref: MWIREC CD **£9.95**
Ref: MWIRET Cassette **£6.95**

⑱ **The Little Book of Big Ideas** NEW
Enjoy the ideas and ideals of the world's greatest thinkers and activists.
Hardback with dust cover, 142 pages.
Ref: BBBIH **£3.99**

⑲ **One World Greeting Cards**
10 cards and envelopes, blank inside for all the year use.
Ref: 00CRD **£4.95**

⑳ **Freeplay Wind-up Radio** NEW
Powered by wind-up mechanism or solar energy. No batteries. Robust. FM, MW. High quality sound.
Ref: MRADIO
£59.99

For the full range of our products see the **NI Gifts Catalogue 1999/2000.**

To Order: Use the tear-out coupon inside the back cover of the magazine.